Magic and Mystery

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by Allegory_for_Hatred

Summary

Dazai is going to Hogwarts—which is crazy because he doesn't have magic. He has a nullifying ability, for goodness' sake! Not that it matters. Dazai is still willing to stick around and cause trouble before he gets shipped back home and stuck in his room again.

And this Quirrell guy is definitely up to something. So that's a good place to start.

Notes

-This fic covers Dazai's first year at Hogwarts
-no con/crit please
-this fic is very out of character, and not even remotely canon compliant.
-save yourself the trouble and don't read this. please

- Translation into Español available: Magic and Mystery/Magia y Misterio (español) by mattd_dal
- Translation into Deutsch available: Magic and Mystery/Magie und Mysterien by Leoflam5

Unusual Things

“You’ll get used to it.”

Dazai glanced up from his hands, frowning. It was strange... the half of his face usually hidden behind bandages was open to the cool air. He didn’t let the unusual sensation show on his face. “You’re the one always telling me not to pick at those bandages. Maybe it’ll get infected and I’ll die.”

Mori offered a pleasant smile. “It’s all healed up, I’m afraid.”

“...I *guess.* ”

Chuckling like he knew something Dazai didn’t, the doctor waved off the concern. Dazai would think the man irritating if he weren’t currently in Mori’s care. A small mercy. “Did you do the research I asked you to?”

“Obviously.” Dazai rolled his eyes, wincing slightly when his right one stung at the movement.

Of course he’d done his research! The information wasn’t easy to find, but the challenge made it all the more intriguing. Magic—the magical community. A whole world hiding just beneath the surface of society. The idea alone filled Dazai with a sort of mute humor. It had been *very difficult* to find *anything* on magic (outside of fiction, which Dazai had immediately discarded with a scowl), and what he had found was rumor at best. But Mori was persistent in his quest for knowledge, so Dazai was as well. Not that *persistence* was going create documents out of thin air, but Mori didn’t seem to realize that and Dazai didn’t have the heart to tell him.

“Hogwarts, right?” he sighed and kicked a foot out, narrowly missing hitting his doctor in the shin. “They’re clever to avoid detection, but they aren’t really doing much with all that power.”

“Oh?”

“Seems like there’s a lot of infighting... is that why you’re suddenly so curious about this place, Sir?”

“Something like that. You aren’t trying to get out of our deal, are you?”

Dazai pouted. “I see the logic in not telling the me purpose of this mission, but also it’s annoying. How am I meant to get information if all I know is you want me to attend this Hogwarts place? I’ll just kill myself for sure. Ah, I read it somewhere. Let me look—” He suddenly reached into his pocket, clicking noisily on a phone. “—something about a killing curse. Hold on—”

Mori raised a brow, that insufferable smile unshakable. “Well, let’s not get carried away, Dazai. Besides, wouldn’t you like to make friends at your new school? I’m sure they wouldn’t appreciate all this suicide nonsense.”

Once Dazai’s phone had returned to his pocket (accompanied by another near-kick to the shin), Mori continued, “Did you find anything else?”

“Something about a war?” Dazai blinked, scratching the back of his head where No Longer Human was a near-silent constant *buzz* . “Non-magic resources could only tell me so much, you know. Once I figure out *where* they keep their documents, I can tell you anything you want.”

“Well, I don’t think you’ll have to worry about that.” At his ward’s annoyed look, the doctor chuckled. “I’ve arranged for a Hogwarts representative to meet with you tomorrow. I’m sure you understand what would happen if this were to go poorly.”

Snapping shut the latch on his first aid kit, Mori beamed. “Remember to act surprised—you've been practicing, right? You’d look so cute with a *shocked* expression—”

This time, his kick didn’t miss.

Pretend like I don’t know magic exists, Dazai thought, grinning over Mori’s melodramatic whines, *I’m still not convinced it does, idiot doctor.*

Snape’s lip curled. “Are you certain this is the correct place?”

“The directory is never wrong. Although,” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled behind the panes of his glasses. “It is curious that a name from Japan should appear on the list.”

Certainly, whoever this child was, he *should* be going to a more local magical school. Snape didn’t see why it had to be Hogwarts—beyond that, he entirely failed to understand why *he* had to come with. It wasn’t exactly tradition for both Dumbledore and the Potion’s Master to welcome every new muggle student to Hogwarts.

It didn’t help that Dumbledore was resolute in not spilling the exact details of this child’s case. The headmaster seemed to read his thoughts.

“For such an unusual case, it’s best to visit personally.”

“What—was Minerva too busy?” Or Hargrid, for that matter. Though, judging from the populated streets, perhaps lugging the half-giant around would have drawn too much attention. Snape knew he wasn’t the type of person new students wanted to meet when being introduced to the magical community. He took great pride in that fact.

Dumbledore gave him a pleasant, if cautious, look. “Just so.”

Snape tried to restrain himself from sighing (from the expression he got in return, he’d hardly done an adequate job). “Will you be enlightening me as to what makes this boy so unusual, then?” He ground out. “Or do you intend to keep me in the dark until the boy’s luggage is all packed aboard the train?”

With shining eyes, the old headmaster seemed to glow with a sort of excitement—or maybe that was humor. Suddenly, he strode up to the front door, leaving Snape to grind his teeth and trail along. Dumbledore does a quick, silent charm in case any language barrier should arise.

Apparently, this boy lived in a rather well-off apartment complex in the middle of Yokohama, Japan. Snape didn’t know the first thing about the place—after-all, rarely did the magically-created list of new students send them so far away. Grudgingly, he allowed himself to be tugged along by Dumbledore to the front entrance.

The headmaster knocked three times.

Not even thrity seconds passed before the door was swung open. Snape’s lip twitched at the sight of the man on the other side—this character reeked on slimy condescension.

Still, Dumbledore and this man (the child’s father, he assumed) wore matching smiles. “Albus Dumbledore,” he introduced himself. “This is my associate, Professor Snape. I’m led to believe this is the home of Dazai Osamu?”

The man smiled wider. It’s the sort of smile that put Snape completely on edge, because the expression was sick with the tangible feeling of deception. The potion maker narrowed his eyes.

“Mori Ougai.” He introduced. “And yes, you’d be correct. May I ask why you’re here?”

Snape shot Dumbledore a glare, but the headmaster didn’t seem to care for the blatant scorn aimed his way. “How peculiar. I’m certain you’d have received owls by now. The system is automated, after all.”

“Owls?”

“Perhaps,” Snape growled, “this conversation is best held indoors.”

“I think that’s best as well. Mr. Mori.”

“Doctor.” He corrected, “Come right in.”

He couldn’t help but feel like the man is up to something. It’s utterly ridiculous—the man is a muggle, after all. And one who didn’t receive an owl in advance, if Snape heard correctly. There’s positively no way this *doctor* can know what they’ll have to say. Snape almost grins himself, imagining the shocked look *Doctor* Mori will give once they reveal the cause for this visit.

Snape's first impression is that the apartment is incredibly bear and almost annoyingly clean. It's not the type of how he often sees when doing house visits—the presence of a child is completely scarce. If Snape didn't know any better, he'd say they'd accidentally went to the wrong address.

Did anyone actually live here?

"Would you like some tea?"

Dumbledore hummed, looking all soft-edges and pleasantries. Just the sort of thing Snape couldn't bear. "That would be lovely."

"No."

Dr. Mori hummed, not offended in the slightest, apparently. He disappeared around the corner, and returned only a moment later with one cup of tea in hand. Snape's frowned deepened when the doctor handed the solitary cup off to the headmaster.

Mori smirked. "So, what'll this be about, then?"

Something about how the man spoke rubbed him the wrong way. It was the sort of tone Lucius used. *Slimy,* his mind supplied without prompting.

"Ah," Dumbledore began, "I'm pleased to inform you that your son has been accepted into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

Mori blinked, expression just stupefied enough for Severus to silently feel quite pleased.

Snape cleared his throat. "Perhaps you've noticed unusual things. Things that can't be explained."

Except, where Severus usually is met with an expression like aghast realization (or continued confusion), the doctor instead raised a brow. It's a look like he's privy to a private joke.

"Unusual things, hm?"

Albus chuckled.

He always hated this part. Muggles can be annoyingly persistent when it comes to understanding magic is real. Snape has had plates levitating around the room, while parent's look on saying it must be windy. He settles in for a long evening. Damn Dumbledore for dragging him along to what so far appears to be a normal house call.

It takes about thirty minutes to convince Dr. Mori that magic is, in fact, real and that they are not planning an elaborate kidnapping of the man's son. Altogether, things went rather smoothly. Good. Maybe they can leave quickly and just be done.

For whatever reason, Severus doesn't think that will be the case.

“ *Dazai* ,” Mori’s voice was sweet like the sound a fruit-fly makes. “Our guests are here.”

Looking up from his bandaged wrists, the eleven-year-old boy frowned, thoughtful. “You were talking for a long time.” Dazai accused passively. Not that he *cares,* of course, but if Mori had made him wait any longer he’d been planning on digging out the razor blade in his drawer and slitting his wrists.

“We all have our roles to play. I expect you’ll put on an equally convincing show.” He replied evenly with a hint of threat to give the words meaning.

Dazai rolled his eyes (the bad one smarted a bit on the turn-around, but he didn’t let the hurt show on his face). “Obviously. Although I don’t know how you expect me to actually do magic. If it’s anything like abilities, I’ll just nullify it before I can do any spells.”

Mori smiled. “You won’t have to do anything today. Besides, I think you’ll find it won’t be so challenging. After all, you are my prodigy, Dazai.” He waved a hand vaguely, chuckling. “Regardless! I’m sure our guests are tired of waiting. Introduce yourself. I’ll be behind shortly.”

Rolling his eyes, Dazai hopped up from where he’d been sitting on his bed. Despite how long he sat there, the sheets didn’t look remotely disturbed. While he walked to the living room, Dazai mentally went over the script he’d prepared in his head. Regular boy finds out he’s magic—that was the play for today. Dazai would love to suck up to the school representatives (or maybe bully them), but all he *really* knows about this mission is that he needs to be at Hogwarts. For now, lying low is the safest best. Even if it is the most boring one.

Ah, well... he can probably make a little fun, right?

He turned around the corner to the seating area. Two pairs of eyes immediately tore away from each other to stare at him.

Dazai watched as their eyes wandered up and down his frame, then back again, seeming to catch on how the bandages wrapped up his arms, legs, and neck. While they assessed him, Dazai took his turn to analyze them.

The older man had a long, white beard. *This must be Dumbledore,* Dazai thought idly. Certainly, the man fit his mental image of your stereotypical Merlin figure. The run-down Mori had given him suggested this Dumbledore character was some sort of big wizarding figure. The type who had his hands in wizard politics, for sure. Definitely someone to be cautious around.

At Dumbledore’s side was a thin, greasy man with long-ish black hair. He seemed like a prickly sort of person at first glance, but Dazai could see there was something more beneath the surface. The fact that he couldn’t immediately tell what this man was hiding meant two

things: 1) he was someone to keep an eye on, and 2) Dazai didn't know nearly enough about the wizarding world.

Being so out of his depth put him on edge. That, and being caged in by two strangers—at least he knew Mori was probably poking around *somewhere* nearby.

"I'm Dazai." He greeted, beaming easily, even though the name caught on his tongue. "I hear something about a school? Sounds boring!"

Dumbledore's laugh was like the twinkling of stars or rustle of feathers. The greasy-looking man, however, seemed to grow even more stern. "My name is Albus Dumbledore. This is Professor Snape. We've come to congratulate you on your acceptance to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"Wizardry?" He paused, as if considering the answer. Dazai put on his best 'innocent child' expression. He'd been practicing—the way his lips curved into a pout was only easy after so many hours spent staring into a mirror, pulling at his face. "Seems a bit absurd."

In return, the bearded one gave him a smile that was so patient, Dazai couldn't help but feel a little offended. On the other hand, the greasy-looking fellow only gave him a look of scorn and disinterest. He briefly wondered if Snape could see through his innocent, childish guise but—well, that's even more absurd than *magic* . Anyway, the professor seemed more fed up with the whole situation that Dazai himself.

"I thought you might say as much," Dumbledore said, smiling still, "Say... where did your guardian wander off to?"

"He's around." Dazai said, shrugging. As if he knows what that slimy doctor was up to. Probably scheming (and not telling him anything, as usual). Honestly, Dazai was almost wondering the same himself. Being alone in a room with two adult strangers outside of his realm of influence was enough to set Dazai's spine ramrod straight. His only consolation was that Mori was probably around here *somewhere.*

Snape growled lowly. "Well, is he going to be coming *back,* anytime soon?"

"Probably.... shouldn't you tell me more about this school, anyway?"

Move the conversation forward, gather information... People were too easy.

Again, Dumbledore just smiled pleasantly. And, really, Dazai hated having to sit around and have trivial details regurgitated at him. Still, he hummed and nodded along at all the right moments. While the headmaster went off about his school and about all he has to learn, Dazai busied himself with wondering what sort of spells might be lethal.

...there's probably a spell for summoning water, right? Could he summon some right into his lungs? Like drowning without all the work of finding a suitable bridge...

When the headmaster cleared his throat, Dazai forced himself away from his morbid contemplations. He blinked up with an expression like he wasn't already bored at the prospect of school Either way, Dumbledore and Mori seemed to see through it.

"Severus will be back in one week to take you for school supplies. Until then... any questions, lad?"

Dazai really, *really* wanted to ask about the killing curse.

"Nope!" He grinned boyishly.

Dr. Mori, who had come back five minutes earlier claiming he'd had to take a phone call, placed his hand on Dazai's head and ruffled his fluffy hair a bit. Dazai tried not to pout, but it was a losing battle, really. At least it was better than the flinch he had actually managed to hold back.

"Well, I think that will be all, then." He hummed. "I trust Dazai will be in safe hands."

Mori said it like a threat, Dazai noted with idle humor.

"Of course." Only, these magic folks didn't really rise to the bait. If anything, Dumbledore seems more accommodating—while Snape just seems more annoyed. Without pause, the headmaster nodded curtly and bid, "We best be off then... Dazai?"

He blinked.

"I look forward to seeing you at Hogwarts. Something tells me you'll have a very interesting year, my boy."

Mori's eyes narrowed slightly, and Dazai thought, *interesting indeed.* The doctor easily ushered the wizard's out the front door (Snape seeming rather eager to leave as it was). Dumbledore waved one last, pleasant (if unnervingly assessing) goodbye. The twinkle in his eye put Dazai on edge.

The second the door snapped shut, Dazai whirled on Mori. "Are you going to tell me what the objective of this job is yet?" He said, voice flat and eyes dull. "Or am I supposed to just keep screwing around?"

Mori's smile was, as always, quite the sickening little thing. "That's sounds good for now."

Of course it did.

The doctor must have read his thoughts, because he chuckled lightly. "Regardless, I do have to get back to work now. I'll be back in a week to hear how your shopping trip went with Professor Snape. Do try not to kill yourself until then."

Across the Ocean

Dazai shot up and opened the door. On the other side, Severus' dull, greasy expression was the perfect counterpart to Dazai's vigor.

The professor's eyes wandered around the front room momentarily. "...I don't see your guardian anywhere."

"It's just me today, actually."

Snape raised a brow, but otherwise didn't look bothered by the announcement. More than that, he just looked annoyed to have to even be there. Well... Dazai could work with that. After all, Mori had basically told him he could do whatever he wanted.

Really, Dazai had spent a good amount of time considering and re-considering just who this Snape fellow was in preparation for today's trip. Unlike last time, he didn't plan on being the only person present not knowing all the players in the game. He knew Snape was tricky—there was definitely something below the surface level going on his him, but it didn't seem to be a threat at the moment. Dazai took momentary reprieve in the fact that he could probably overpower Snape if he really needed to. That Dumbledore guy... Dazai wasn't sure about him.

He was bringing a knife just in case.

"Come on, then." Severus growled. "I'd like to finish up with you as early as possible."

"Hm? Don't you like me?" Dazai grinned harmlessly.

In return, Snape sent him a seething glare. He grabbed the collar of Dazai's button-up and practically shoved him out the door. Dazai frowned at the rough treatment, but it was hardly something he wasn't used to.

"You're a teacher, aren't you? Shouldn't you be more kind to your students?"

Snape began speed-walking down the street. Dazai skipped after him without complaint.

" *Future* student."

Ah. What a reassuring correction. "...then does that make Snape my *future* professor?" Dazai asked, a dangerous gleam in his eye.

However, Severus immediately halted in his tracks. He spun on his heels and bent down to glare directly into Dazai's eyes. "That is no excuse not to respect your betters, boy!"

Dazai tried to restrain himself from rolling his eyes (or flinching, he wasn't sure which urge was the strongest). It seemed the rough disposition and disrespectful demeanor only applied

to Snape himself. People—adults especially—were so hard to understand! Well... not really. But he sure did find their temperamental hypocrisy annoying. “Yes sir.”

Snape blinked. Dazai didn’t think he expected such a half-hearted acquiescence to the verbal assault. The man cleared his throat and straightened back up. “Good.”

After only a moment of silence, Dazai’s upset over his lack of knowledge on the subject of magic got the best of him. “So, where are we going, anyway?”

“ Diagon Alley.” He snapped. “Can’t you go even one minute without blathering on?”

“Nope!” Dazai said, popping the ‘p’ noisily. “How are we getting there? You can probably teleport, right?” When Severus only continued walking faster, the young mafioso chirped, “Or fly on a broom? Unless you plan to walk across an ocean, that is. That’s too exhausting, I think I’ll just drown.”

“ *Drowning,”* the professor spat, “is hardly an acceptable response to slight hardship, boy.”

“Walking across an ocean is only *slightly* difficult for you?!”

“And we will be taking a bus. No more questions.”

Ah. So they’re taking a *bus* across the ocean. Somehow, that didn’t really clear things up. Regardless of the specifics, Dazai could reason they’d be taking some sort of magical transportation system in the form of public transit. It was almost exciting! Finally, he’d be getting some of his curiosity sated. Ugh—Dazai hates being out of the loop.

He wondered what this “ Diagon al” place was like. When Dazai had tried to research the magical world, he’d mostly come up blank. A few articles here, a book or two there... everything he’d managed to scrounge up was vague and predictable. It felt like reading information that had been so unimportant, it had managed to slip through the highly discriminative hands of the magical bureaucracy without much concern.

Dazai felt a small trill of excitement.

Suddenly, Severus came to a halt. When Dazai nearly stumbled into him, the dark-haired man smirked. He reached into his pocket, withdrew a wand, and stuck it out as though hailing a cab. Dazai blinked.

“Normally,” the professor said at the bemused expression, “the Knight Bus doesn’t leave Britain. Hogwarts has made a special request for you, so I expect you to behave.”

Before he can reply, something catches Dazai’s attention. Without realizing, his mouth gapes open slightly. A large, triple-decker bus came bouncing down the street at break-neck speeds. Just when he thought it would go shooting past them, the Knight Bus came to an abrupt stop directly in front of Snape’s wand.

The doors opened slowly—mechanically. Snape retracted his wand and stepped onto the bus. “Are you planning to gawk all day, boy?”

With a grin, Dazai shook his head and skipped in beside his guide. “Nope! It’s just,” he hummed, looking all around the bus curiously as he followed Snape towards the back, “making a bus taller and faster seems like an odd thing to magic. Haven’t you guys figured out teleportation yet?”

Severus took a seat near the back of the bus and shot Dazai a glare. He waited until the boy had taken the seat beside him to reply. “As a *courtesy* to you,” he spat, “we are taking the bus. For someone so unfamiliar with magic as yourself, boy, apparition would be incredibly uncomfortable.”

Apparition, huh? Still, Dazai smiled pleasantly on cue. “Ah, thanks, then.” Anything he wanted to say next was stolen from his throat when the Knight Bus started to move.

Now, at most, Dazai has ridden in the back of Mafia cars. They’re black and long and very, *very* controlled. Even driving over bodies, you can hardly feel the bumps. In contrast, the Knight Bus, immediately upon starting, drove like... well, Dazai wasn’t sure what to compare it to. All he knew was that his fingers were dyed white with how tight he grabbed the seat to stop from falling and how heavy his headache was building. The bus peeled down the street faster than Dazai thought was reasonable, and with each blink he took it shot from one road to the next.

Snape raised a brow at his charge’s tense frame. Dazai pretended he didn’t notice the way the man’s lips twitched upwards.

“This is a pub.”

Snape barely glanced down at him, already abandoning the bus in favor of heading toward the doors.

“I mean, I wouldn’t mind a drink, but isn’t that irresponsible of you?”

“Shut up.”

Dazai’s mouth clamped shut with a snap. He peeked up at Snape through long, cinnamon bangs.

The professor sighed, sounding as though dealing with Dazai were a form of advanced torture (much to Dazai’s amusement). “The *Leaky Cauldron* the entrance to Diagon Alley, where you will be buying your supplies for this year.” He relented.

Dazai made an appreciative noise. When Snape opened the pub’s door, he followed in obediently.

The place wasn't especially busy, although even a few people Dazai was unfamiliar with was enough to put him on edge. The shabby atmosphere didn't do much to help with that feeling, but Snape didn't seem worried so much as annoyed. Severus made a gesture in greeting to some of the staff.

No, the Leaky Cauldron wasn't very busy. This was probably the only reason Dazai noticed the person loitering in the back corner. The man wore a turban and had a stuttering frame like he wasn't sure he had a right to be there. Dazai's nose scrunched up—this stranger gave him a bad feeling. A feeling like you were looking at someone with no moral standards. But then again, Dazai was pretty sure he gave off the same "I'm a threat, stay away from me" aura as this fellow.

Maybe he was the wizard version of mafia.

The man looked up with wide, startled eyes; he seemed to recognize the feeling of a fellow monster's eyes on him. Dazai gave him a thumbs up. Solidarity.

"What on *Earth* are you doing?"

Dazai turned to see Snape's glower. "Looking around."

Snape's brow pinched. He looked from Dazai to the stranger, then back again, and offered a look like barely concealed suspicion. *Oops,* Dazai thinks, *is this guy actually bad news?* Not like it really matters one way or the other.

"So, where's this Diagonally place, Sir?"

" *Diagon Alley."* He corrected, tense.

" Diagon ... No. I'm sorry, that's a terrible name."

"Stop talking."

"Yes sir."

Snape shot him a glare. After making sure Dazai was going to stay at his side (quietly!), the professor walked to face a brick wall. He pulled out a wand.

"Wow. A brick wall—"

"What did I say."

Using the wand, Snape tapped along the bricks. Dazai stared in rapt attention as the bricks begin to slide and rearrange themselves until something resembling a doorway was left in place of the wall. At once, the bricks stopped moving. Bouncing on his heels, Dazai peeked out from under Snape's arm.

On the other end of the wall was a bustling street that Dazai was fairly sure didn't make sense with the layout of the city they were just in. The sheer number of people he could see just by

standing in the Leaky Cauldron made Dazai feel a little dizzy, but Snape was quick to urge him into Diagon Alley regardless. Behind them, the wall closed back up.

Snape set off at a quick pace.

Dazai immediately made to follow, but he stumbled a bit trying to keep pace; he was two steps for every one of Snape's. It was too crowded! There was no way he could keep track of every single person around—the air breathed with constant threat. Or, no... Well, Dazai *was* on edge from all the people around, but there was something else in the air, too. Like a quiet buzz in the back of his skull, the air seemed alive! It made his brain itch as if No Longer Human was in effect. Dazai glanced up at Snape, but the man didn't seem to notice how the air was practically alive with energy.

Huh.

Questions for another time. For now, Dazai just wanted to get somewhere quiet. He skipped ahead a few steps to half-run side-by-side with Snape. The man barely sent him a passive glance at the change in pace. It was barely another minute before their destination became apparent.

The huge, white building before Dazai would have the honor of being the grandest thing he'd ever seen, had the mafia's skyrise not been so oppressively towering. Still, he supposed by magical standards, the place was rather interesting. Dazai spared a glance to Snape. "What is that place? It's where we're going, right?"

Severus glared down at him, as though curiosity was something to be deterred. With a pleasant smile, Dazai tried and failed to see the problem with gathering information (unless secrets were being kept, that was). Regardless of his clear displeasure, the professor grunted, " Gringott's bank. You brought money, didn't you, boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good." He barked. "Exchange it with the goblins while I—"

"Goblins are real?!"

Grabbing the boy's arm, Snape growled lowly and forced Dazai toward the bank. He didn't seem to notice how Dazai stiffened under the grip. "Yes. And you'll do well not to spout such nonsense in their faces. Now—" He pushed his charge through an ajar door. "—behave."

Dazai's eyes widened minutely. For all intents and purposes, it was just a regular bank, if a bit ornate. Except behind the desks and scattered about working studiously were what Dazai could only assume were the goblins Snape had mentioned. He'd never seen a magical creature before! Granted, the concept of abilities had somewhat desensitized him to such absurdities. Still, goblins! What others sort of creatures existed?

He wanted to meet an omen of death!

Rocking back on his heels, Dazai rummaged around his coat pocket before pulling out three pristine hundred-dollar bills. Not a wrinkle in sight, Dazai noted with pleasure. Someone cleared their throat and he tried not to startle at the closeness.

Snape glared down at him, lip curled. “We haven’t got all day, boy.”

Shuffling a foot away from the professor, Dazai made a small sound of agreement. When he started towards one of the bank tellers, Snape trailed a step after him. He stopped about a foot away from a particularly mean-looking teller.

At the dull look the goblin gave him, Dazai merely grinned. He set the bills down on the counter with a certain flair usually reserved for more interesting tasks. “You can exchange this for me, can’t you?” He asked.

The teller pulled a face, nose scrunching up like he was looking at something unpleasant. He didn’t reach for the money.

Dazai glanced up to Snape with a look that silently conveyed, *am I supposed to do something else?* When it became apparent the goblin was content to simply glare down at Dazai, Snape cleared his throat.

The professor placed his hand on the money and slid it further across the desk, wearing a look like he was at the end of his rope.

To Dazai’s surprise, the goblin immediately nodded and set to work. The work was quick and efficient—a small pouch of coins was placed in front of Snape was a click barely a moment after. When Dazai reached out to take them, the goblin’s hands quickly pulled back and hid themselves away behind the counter.

Magical creatures are strange, Dazai thought. He peeked inside the bag, frowning down at the collection of coins he couldn’t recognize. The coins jangled noisily in the pouch when he shut it. Dazai blinked up at Snape, commenting idly. “I don’t think they like me.”

Snape glared down at him, but there was something contemplative in that gaze. Without a word, he walked towards the exit.

“Ah,” Dazai followed, feeling a tickle of amusement underneath the buzz of magic at the base of his skull, “What’s that look for, sir?”

Snape’s nose scrunched up. “I *was* going to run an errand, but because you seem to be unable to accomplish even a basic task such as this, I’m forced to do it later.”

“Aw.” Dazai whined. *It’s not really my fault, though. “* You have a secret mission?”

“Enough.” The professor spat, hurrying out of the bank. “I’d rather not have to spend all day babysitting you.”

Dazai raised a brow, but hurried after him. “Are they always like that, the goblins? Ignoring people.”

“No.”

...But the goblins refused to help him. How interesting! Dazai’s brows pulled together in thought.

“Perhaps they could sense how obnoxious you are and wanted nothing to do with it.”

“Is that a joke?” He teased. “I thought you were a stick-in-the-mud, but I guess even that type of person can joke every once and awhile. Sir.”

“Enough.” Snape barked. “And hurry up—we need to get your supplies quickly.”

Dazai nodded, serious. “ So you can accomplish your secret mission!”

“So I can get back to work without you tagging along like a leech.”

Wands

Chapter Summary

CW: self-harm, blood

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai squinted down at his supplies list before folding it back up and sticking it in his coat. He smiled emptily at the building Snape had stopped in front of.

“Ollivander’s?” he hummed, “That’s wands?”

Snape shot him a scathing look, but that sort of anger wasn’t as impressive compared to the mafia members Dazai was familiar with. For now, however, he didn’t mind going along with the professor’s whims. Until he had some more concrete research on magic, following orders was a safer play.

He would make even better decisions if Mori would just tell him what in the hell the plan was. Bastard.

“Right,” Dazai hummed, “I’ll just go in then.”

He almost expected Snape to scamper off, but the man followed only a half-step behind. Dazai must have made a curious expression at that, because Snape sighed.

“It seems I can’t trust you to shop on your own.” He hissed, “Besides, the idea that any wand would willingly put up with you boggles the mind.”

“It’s not my fault the goblins don’t like me!” *Probably. “* Wait—does that mean the wands are sentient?”

Snape shot him another look just as the opened the door and entered the shop.

Immediately, Dazai was greeted by towering shelves, filled from end-to-end with small boxes. He blinked up at what he presumed to contain wands with a look of awe usually reserved for things of particular interest. So these were the items that allowed people to manipulate magic! He’d love to crack one open and see what made it work—if only just to have something to do in this tedious world. Dazai reached out to take one off the shelf.

“Excuse me.”

An older-looking man suddenly appeared directly to Dazai's left. Not having heard him approach, Dazai startled and pulled his hand back with a hiss.

"Ollivander." Snape greeted with a passive grunt over his shoulder.

"Severus." The wandmaker smiled, "It's not often you come to my shop. I trust your wand is still in working-order?"

"Indeed." He stuck his chin out, "Unfortunately, a foreign muggle-born requires more delicacy than our groundskeeper can manage, so I have the task of delivering him around Diagon Alley."

"I suppose Hagrid does tend to make a scene... A wand for the boy, then?"

Snape made a noise from his throat.

With a nod, Ollivander spun on Dazai. His eyes were narrow and assessing in a way that made Dazai's spine snap a bit straighter. Still, he was familiar with heavy attention like this enough to school his expression.

Dazai blinked sluggishly at the older man, offering an expression perfectly dull. For his part, Ollivander only continued to study him, a look like optimistic interest in his eyes. After a moment of silent staring, Severus cleared his throat loudly.

Ollivander nodded abruptly. "Your wand hand?"

A bit off guard at the non-sequitur, Dazai held out his right hand. The old wandmaker probably meant dominant hand, and while that technically meant he could use either hand, Dazai was eager to get a move on. Ollivander's eyes held nearly the same level of cryptic calculation of Mori's, and that meant all his secrets were easily fair game.

Without warning, a long stick was being shoved into Dazai's hand. He stared at it for a moment before looking back to Ollivander. "Walnut and dragon hearstring. 8 ½ inches."

"Well, give it a wave, boy!"

He did. Despite how little he appreciated the lack of information, he had to admit he was curious. Giving the wand a swish and a flick—

Nothing happened. Not even a light nor a sound. Dazai frowned, waving again with a bit more force than necessary.

"Not that one, then." Seeing how the boy pouted at his wand, Ollivander tried for a reassuring voice. Dazai didn't think he sounded all that convincing but couldn't place why. "We'll find a wand for you yet."

He took the glorified stick back and immediately replaced it with another. "Apple wood and unicorn hair, then."

Gripping the wood firmly, Dazai gave another wave. Again, no response.

The look in Ollivander's eyes—he didn't like that manic sort of eager. It was a look like he had found something quite fun to play with. Not wasting another second, another wand found its way into Dazai's hands. Then another. And another.

From beside the door, Severus pinched the bridge of his nose.

Nearly three hours later, and Dazai had effectively bled the wand shop dry. Wand after wand after wand—rendered useless in his hands. Ollivander rubbed his chin, frowning. Still, there was a glint in his eyes that made Dazai think the man was actually having quite a bit of fun. He supposed working in the same business for so long must get boring.

With how much pressure Snape was using to rub at his head, Dazai thought the man's head might explode. He almost wanted to tell the man to just go home, but he was having his own fun driving the professor mad.

Still, it was a useless endeavor to look for a wand. With No Longer Human the way it was, Dazai was nearly certain any of these so-called-wands would become little more than useless twigs upon contact. He still wasn't entirely convinced he even *had* magic. Despite what Snape and Dumbledore and—hell, even *Mori* had said, Dazai still hadn't faced any proof whatever magic he had wasn't nullified. Dazai didn't really know what game Mori was playing, throwing him into the fire like this.

Annoying. He'd rather be hanging from a noose than be getting plunged into a world he knew nothing about. Squinting slightly at the wandmaker, Dazai felt a headache building in the back on his brain.

"I don't think your wands like me. Hey—let's just give up and go home. Do you think they sell crab anywhere nearby?"

Ollivander scratched the bridge of his brow, expression tight. He easily ignored Dazai's tangent. "It seems not. My! I've not had a case like this in decades!"

"So?" Snape barked. "Am I expected to just bring the boy to Hogwarts without a way for casting spells?"

"There's no wands in potions, right? Don't you want me to hang around?"

Snape shot him something like a glare, even though Dazai was trying his best to seem pleasant. Ah—maybe the potions professor could already tell that Dazai was a slacker at heart.

"No, no!" Ollivander interrupted, waving his hand. He cast a scrutinous gaze between the duo, eyes lingering for nearly a minute on Dazai's teasing expression. "Well, maybe… It is strange though. If I didn't know any better, I'd say you didn't have any magic at all."

Dazai's eyes narrowed. "About that wand, then—"

"Right, of course! I'll have to make one custom just for you. Very exciting, really. Not very often a case like yourself comes around." He paused for a moment. "Three weeks… maybe four. And I'll need something of yours, of course. Hair always does the trick—"

"How about blood?"

Both Ollivander and Snape startled, blinking at the bandaged boy with twin expressions of something like shock. The wandmaker dropped his hands mid-way through an exaggerated, demonstrative motion. "For the core… yes, I suppose that would do."

Severus' lip twitched.

Good. Dazai nodded, reassured. Hair… he wasn't sure about hair. But blood could easily act as an extension of his own body, especially if Dazai could figure out how to channel his "magic" into it. He was optimistic that if the wand contained blood from his still-beating heart, something might work. Even if that something was just him having a piece of wood filled with blood. While he was still positive this whole magic thing wasn't going to pan out… well, he'd made a deal with Mori. Might as well try and get a functioning wand.

Anyway, Dazai was kind of excited to see if it would work, too

"Blood... yes, yes. I think it will do just nicely!" The man considered him with an indecipherable look. "I'll need a vial, course. I don't suppose—"

"Ah, have you got one, then?" He pulled the pocket knife from the pocket of his long, dark coat— "A jar?" Snape shot him a quick look—something almost challenging or annoyed.

—and promptly dug the blade through the bandages on his left arm and into his skin.

Again, both parties stilled, expressions aghast. Severus wore a look Dazai was hesitant to classify—something jarred, yet cautious. Seemingly too shocked by his abrupt self-harming, the professor and the wandmaker stood in silent surprise until the white bandages started to dye red.

A drop of blood fell to the floor.

Snape was the first to react, rushing forward with an expression like stone. "What are you doing?!" Without warning, he took hold of Dazai's arm and pressured the stab wound.

At the sudden, unwanted contacted, Dazai had to will himself not to flinch (it was a near thing, really). "Ah, professor... Aren't you listening? I'm getting blood."

Snape frowned and gave the boy an indescribable, blank look.

Spurred into action, Ollivander abruptly vanished behind a row of shelves. He returned not a minute later with a small light-blue cup.

Dazai didn't waste a second to struggle out of Severus' grip, laying his hand an inch above the cup. Slowly, a thin a trail of blood began to fill the cup. He could feel the other two's eyes bearing into him.

"That should be enough." The wandmaker said lightly just as Dazai was starting to think he would need to cut again. "Thank you..." The man sent him a quiet, searching gaze.

He must not have found his answer, because all the man did was rub at his chin like a person trying to solve a puzzle that was missing its corner pieces. Ollivander frowned, thoughtful. "I'll send an owl when it's done."

At his side, Snape growled and tore Dazai's arm back to him. "Outside. *Now."*

" Huh? Shouldn't I pay him, sir?" He smirked.

Ollivander, who was staring into the depths of Dazai's blood pool before then, gave a mostly casual wave. "Consider it free of charge. I've not had a challenge like this in some time. And the wait, after all..."

At the declaration, Snape didn't wait a moment longer. Gripping Dazai's arm with a white-knuckled fist, the professor dragged him out of the shop roughly. Despite the rough treatment, the mafioso trailed behind with only a look of mild amusement.

The second the door clicked shut behind them, Severus whirled around, staring directly into Dazai's eyes. "What in the *hell* are you doing?!"

He blinked, nonplussed. "Getting blood? Wasn't that obvious?"

"It—!" Severus moved to pinch the bridge of his nose, but seem to think better of it when he realized there was blood on his hand. "Don't be short with me, boy. Stabbing oneself is not the correct response to any situation. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir." *No.* Clearly, Professor Snape wasn't a very well-versed individual, because Dazai could think of a number of situations in which stabbing himself might be beneficial. Easy access to his own blood was only one of many on that hypothetical list of merits.

"Good. I don't know where this idiotic behavior began," his eyes slowly followed the multitude of bandages on the boy's body with an expression Dazai couldn't quite discern, "but it will *not* be tolerated any longer."

Dazai nodded, nonplussed by the overreaction.

" Now let me heal that cut."

"Hm? It's fine. Don't bother!"

His arm was coated in red, absorbed all the way to his elbow in the cotton bandages. Snape glared at the blood, then back to Dazai impatiently.

"It's fine. Mori is a doctor—he'll patch me up."

Severus' brows raised.

Ah—shit. He should probably call Mori his dad, right? Oh well. "Anyway," he transitioned fluently, "I promise to behave the rest of the way! What's next on the list, sir?"

Again, the teacher's gaze simply hardened. "Stay still." Snape's grip on the boy's bloody hand tightened, holding him in place. Without another word, he pulled out his wand.

With renewed vigor, Dazai tugged his arm to get free. This only stood to make the wound tear a bit larger, however. He felt like a child, struggling against the man's harsh grip fruitlessly.

" *Stay still."* He repeated lowly, "We still have shopping to do and I won't have you dragging this on longer than it has to by bleeding out on the way."

Ha. As if Dazai would be so lucky.

He'd rather just wrap the cut in bandages but, well... he *was* curious what it feels like to have magic used on him. At first, he wasn't sure that magic would even work around him, given No Longer Human. But the Knight Bus didn't seem to have any problems. And there was that slight hint of magic buzzing in the air of Diagon Alley, too. That magic had been brushing up against him all day. So really, what's the harm?

For some reason, it still seemed like a bad idea.

Maybe he just didn't like Snape touching him. Regardless, Dazai didn't actually have a choice. He pulled a face, gave up on the pointless struggling, and offered a sheepish look instead. With a childish pout at where Snape's hand left a white mark on him, Dazai whined, "Please be more gentle with me, sir. I'm fragile."

Snape must not have cared for the display, because his scowl only deepened. Still, Dazai couldn't help but to perk up in interest when his professor raised a wand and pointed it to the wound.

" *Episkey* ."

Dazai stared down at the weeping wound, then blinked. That tingle of magic he'd felt buzzing in the air seemed to sing—the air began to feel thick around his arm where the wand was pointed. He waited to see the wound mend over, but after a second, that thick swell of magic vanished.

He looked from the very-much-still-bleeding cut up to Snape, trying for a look of innocence. "Sir?"

Snape's brow furrowed and he gave the wand another (if more terse) swish." *Episkey."* He ground out.

Again, that buzz of magic followed by an absence. Dazai chuckled lowly. Was No Longer Human nullifying magic after all? "Well, that's that. Guess I'll just have it patched up later." He'd definitely have to investigate this later.

Snape's expression didn't clear. If anything, the growl building in his throat only threatened to bark out louder. "What are you doing?"

"...are you sure you didn't just do it wrong?"

The grip on his arm returned ten-fold, and Dazai felt himself go tense in response.

"I didn't *do it wrong* , boy."

"Ah," Dazai hummed, trying for teasing, "I don't believe you.'

He jerked Dazai's arm, forcing Dazai to take a stumbling step forward. For all his luster and charm, Dazai wasn't physically strong enough to not be tugged around like a ragdoll (or worse: like a child).

"What. Did. You. *Do?"*

" Nothing." *But I might stab you if you don't let go of me.* Dazai's eyes narrowed, but he tried not to look quite as defensive as he felt by smiling. "Didn't you say we were in a hurry? Anyway, it's already healing up."

It wasn't.

Not that it mattered. Dazai had been beaten, bruised, and shot-at enough times to know when a wound was serious. Something like this wouldn't kill him—it wasn't deep enough. Unfortunately.

The glower on Snape's face didn't lessen. His lip pulled up in something like disgust blended with annoyance. "I will not tolerate this disrespect at school, boy. Let's hope that bleeding out on the way to getting your books teaches you something about obedience."

If bleeding out was this easy, he'd have done it ages ago. Regardless, Dazai couldn't help the pleased smile that crossed his face when Snape acquiesced. Unfortunately, he was sure the professor was also giving the situation some cautious thought, and Dazai didn't really like to be under the microscope like that.

"Books, sir?"

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading :-)
and commenting!! everytime I get a comment my heart goes aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa anyway ily

The Twins

Chapter Summary

Dazai meets some fellow students.

Chapter Notes

bonus chapter! because i wrote an extra chapter the other week lol ! ! next update is Saturday as per usual

on an unrelated note I'm glad at least a couple people are reading this bc I have..... a lot of buffer chapters lol
comments are very very much appreciated!!!! ily

The bookstore was crammed full of people. It was wall-to-wall books and back-to-back wizards. Dazai's breath caught in his chest as he struggled for something like an even breath. But the flat look on his face betrayed none of the tension in his spine. Dazai shot a quick glance at Snape. For whatever reason, once he saw the professor standing at his side, it was a little easier to pretend he wasn't sweating.

Ugh. Too many people. All the noise wasn't helping his headache, either.

Catching Dazai's eye, Snape's frown twitched. "I have something to take care of." he said, suddenly. "Buy your books while I'm busy."

"Hah?" Dazai gaped. He could feel the people all around them—their mere presence made his skin crawl. "Aren't you supposed to help me?"

The professor rolled his eyes. "It's a bookstore. I'm sure even a child like yourself can figure it out."

"What makes you think that? I stabbed myself like ten minutes ago."

Severus clicked his tongue and put his hands on Dazai's thin shoulders with a grip like a raven's talons. "Behave."

Distantly, Dazai thought, *this must be important.* Amidst the foreign, tense atmosphere of a crowded place, at least the subvert threat in the professor's voice was familiar. As if he were a well-trained dog, Dazai nodded and breathed out a sigh. *Don't fight back,* his brain

supplied easily over the buzz of energy in the air. That sort of mentality never failed him before.

“Good. Buy your books and do not leave the store.” He turned and grabbed the door-handle. “And for Merlin’s sake, don’t stab yourself, boy.” With that, he shut the door behind him.

Dazai pouted at the doorway, watching as the shadow of his guide disappeared on the other side of the glass in the direction of Gringotts. How curious. What sort of business did the professor have that he would abandon his duties so easily?

Hmm... he’d just take his time browsing the books in the meantime. Sneaking out to spy on Snape now would just land him in trouble before the fun had even started.

Anyway, ever since Mori told him to start researching the magical community, he’d been *dying* to pick up some of their literature. He hated to give them kudos, but wizards certainly knew how to keep their documents under wraps. Dazai glanced down at the pouch of foreign coins in his hand—he’d stolen some extra money from Mori before Snape had come to pick him up this morning. It was probably enough to buy everything on his list and then some...

Information first; spying on professor Snape later!

Suddenly feeling a bit eager to be moving, Dazai skipped into the bookstore faux-merrily. In his excitement to inspect all the books for sale, he could almost convince himself the place wasn’t so crowded. Still, a deep breath and a focused head would help to pretend all these strangers weren’t rubbing up against him in the aisles.

He briefly skimmed the required book list. There were quite a few! At the very least, they’d be interesting for a beginner like himself. Still, it’d be prudent to save those ones for last.

But before he grabbed the books he needed, Dazai wanted to look at some of the higher-levels texts that weren’t required. He scanned the shelves passively, gaze searching as the tomes grew thicker and more complex down the aisle. *Travels with Trolls, Gadding with Ghouls, Holidays with Hags...* Were these written for children? Dazai passed them all with only a raised brow and the conscious thought of, *I expected better.* Once he got to the very back of the shop, however, he stopped.

Confronting the Faceless, A Guide to Advanced Transfiguration... Now *these* ones looked interesting! Honestly, why mess around with the beginner books when he’d probably be fine jumping ahead? Gathering as much information as possible was extra important—especially because Mori was so clearly hiding something from him. Bastard.

Suddenly, Dazai’s legs locked into place, his eyes blowing wide at the sight of a red- spined book poking out the the shelf.

“The Complete Guide to Wizarding Suicide”

He plucked it off the shelf like a bird snatching a mouse and flipped open to a page at random, eyes wide in anticipation. Wizarding suicide! Dazai buzzed with barely concealed excitement. He couldn’t wait to try—

“Well, well,” a voice interrupted.

A different voice finished, “A young trouble-maker? Shouldn’t you be up front reading the kiddie-books?”

Dazai whirled on his feet, tense and ready for… *something.* He hadn’t even heard them approach! He was so distracted with the books and with how many other people are crowded around, Dazai had stopped paying attention to each individual person. He could hear Mori berating him now.

Waltzing down the aisle, one—no, two—people approached in a casual stride. They looked identical. When the tall, red-headed boys stopped about a foot from Dazai, they were each grinning ear-to-ear and wearing matching looks of mischief.

Dazai blinked up at them, then smiled emptily. “Ah, I’m being harassed. Is this bullying?”

“Come on, we’re just playing around!”

“Although I do wonder why you’re back here. Got lost?”

Holding up the book, Dazai chuckled. “Looking at books, of course.”

This time, it’s the boys who were caught-off guard. “A suicide manual?”

The other wore an odd expression. “I don’t that’s meant to be for sale.”

“Just my luck, then! Do you think it’s free?”

For a moment, the boys shared a look. They seemed to come to a decision when one plucked the book from Dazai’s hand and the other put his hands on Dazai’s shoulders, guiding him out from the back section. Flustered, Dazai let himself be pushed into the aisle for first year books.

“Mom!” The two—brothers, evidently—yelled with one voice, “We found a sad-looking kid!”

A plump-looking, ginger woman turned form the shelf. Her eyes passed over the brothers, then Dazai with a look concern. “Fred, George—what have I said about harassing other students? Let go of the poor boy, Fred!”

“Ah, come on, Mom!” The boy—Fred, whined. Still, he took his hands from Dazai’s shoulders.

Dazai untensed easily and plastered on a pleasant smile.

“We’re just making sure he’s not lost.” George chimed in. Then, with a frown, he added, “He was looking at some weird book in the back.”

Fred nodded, enthusiastic.

The woman's lip twitched down and she gave Dazai a searching look. "You're a first year, aren't you? Honey, all of your books should be up here. What's your name?"

"Dazai Osamu." He beamed. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"You can call me Mrs. Weasley." She replied, looking pleasantly surprised by Dazai's manners. "I assume the twins introduced themselves?"

"No Ma'am. But they did steal my book and kidnap me." Dazai said, matter-of-fact. He shot a quick, subvert smirk to Fred and George.

Mrs. Weasley balked. "Boys!"

While she scolded the brothers, Dazai tried to stifle his laughter. Ah, meddling was fun. Dr. Mori and the others at the Port Mafia were no fun to mess with—he had the scars to prove it. But regular people can be manipulated without much consequence. It's not like any of these people are smart enough to know he's screwing with them, anyway.

Fred and George, despite being berated by their mother, returned Dazai's grin two-fold.

He'd love to stay and mess around, but Snape would be coming back soon and he'd rather stay in the man's good graces at least until school started. Dazai cleared his throat. "I should get going then Professor Snape will yell at me if I'm not done when he gets back."

The twins startled. Fred coughed, looking jokingly quite aghast. "You're here with *Snape!?"*

"Poor kid," George put a hand over his heart, "What'd you have to do to get stuck with him?"

Did Snape have a bad reputation at Hogwarts? He's the only teacher Dazai knew so far—probably by virtue of his being muggle-born from Japan. "Is he that bad?"

"Is he that—!?" Fred started. " Yes he's that bad! Absolutely terrible to every house except Slytherin!"

"No fun at all. Takes pranks too seriously."

Mrs. Weasley cleared her throat, looking every bit a reprimanding mother. "Didn't I say not to prank teachers?"

"Hmm… no I'm sure I've never heard that. Does that sound familiar, Fred?"

"Not at all, George."

She sighed and turned the attention back on Dazai, who had been snickering quietly to himself. "Why don't you shop with us until Professor Snape comes back? I've got another son your age starting at Hogwarts this year too—Ron!"

"What?"

Dazai blinked, stepping closer to a bookshelf as another red-head appeared. This Ron character was a bit taller than him, Dazai noted with a pout.

“Oh.” Brows pinched together, he greeted. “I’m Ron. Ron Weasley.”

“Dazai.” He waved and offered a pleasant smile in return. No reason to be hostile, really. Besides, he had some time until Snape got back. Having a loyal follower at Hogwarts would probably prove useful (assuming he actually *had* magic, like Mori said, and he didn’t get kicked out for being a fake).

Mrs. Weasley cleared her throat, turning back to the twins. “We still have your brother’s old copies for most of these... but this one here’s new.” She pointed at something on her list, “Go off and find it now, boys. And don’t harass any other students this time!”

“Never!” They chimed before vanishing out of sight. Dazai watched them go with an empty, bemused smile.

“Don’t worry ‘bout them.” Ron said under his breath, “You haven’t gotten your books yet, have you? I’ve got to use Perce’s old first year books, but I can still take a look with you.”

“Perce?”

“Percy. He’s a prefect this year. Won’t shut up about it.”

“Prefect. Right.”

Ron blinked owlishly while Dazai skimmed his letter. After a moment, he looked up to scan the shelves.

“...you don’t know what a prefect is.” The ginger said, matter-of-fact.

“Well,” Dazai double-checks a title then pulls a book off its shelf. “It’s a school thing. I don’t bother with boring details like that.”

Rons nods, like this makes sense. “Right? I don’t know why anyone could ever be so excited ‘bout being a prefect. I’m much more interested in learning spells.”

Dazai spares him a wayward glance, smiling slightly in jest. “Eh, really? I was thinking history would be fun!”

“Don’t even joke about that! Fred once told me the history professor will cut out the tongues of any student who talks in class!”

“...right. Are you sure he isn’t messing with you?” *That’s what I would do.*

“ Well...”

“Those twins seem the type. Hey—help me find this book, since you’re just standing around doing nothing.”

“Oi! I’m trying to be nice!”

“Standard Book of Spells—where's that?” Dazai talked over him, looking around energetically.

Seeming to realize arguing was a lost cause, Ron heaved a sigh. “Up front. C’mon then.”

Dazai offered an easy beam and trailed after the ginger like an eager mutt.

“Here.” Ron said after a moment, turning on his heels to drop a book on top of Dazai’s growing pile. Two down, six to go!

“Thanks... what about this one?”

He heaved an aching sigh. “Over here... I’m not just some dog to order around, y’know.”

Magical Theory— could be an interesting read. Dazai took it, replying airily, “Hmm... well, what are you then? Hey, what’s the human equivalent of a dog?”

Ron blinked, affronted.

“Someone who’s loyal, obedient, and imprints quickly—”

“Hey!”

“Oh. Are we friends now? What sort of things do friends do?”

" Wha —! *Friends* are not the same things as *dogs* !”

“Are you sure?" Dazai frowned and shot an assessing, thinned glance to the Weasley. “I don’t see the difference. Anyway, where’s this *Fantastic Beasts* book?”

A moment passed before Ron finally sighed. “You’re standing next to it.”

“Oh, thanks friend!”

“...whatever.”

Dazai made a light humming noise, feeling vaguely triumphant, and reached out to run his finger over the book spines.

“ *Merlin* !“ Ron suddenly shrieked. “What’s wrong with your arm?!”

Dazai blinked, looking around for a moment before realizing who the ginger was talking to. “Oh, right.” He plucked the correct textbook from the shelf and smiled aimlessly. At the corner of his vision, Dazai noticed the twins return with their books. “A gruesome tale. Maybe I shouldn’t say.”

“What?” Ron paled, “What happened?”

He hummed, pulling a face like he was lost in thought. Dazai paused to grab another book, if only just to leave Ron hanging for a moment longer. “I was attacked.” He said finally, speaking in a low, grim tone. “There’s a charming criminal wandering around with a knife, I guess. He’s very handsome and is very talented with a knife! He asked if I wanted to commit a double suicide, and I was going to agree, but I was a little busy. So he stabbed me.”

“Really?! Why didn’t you report it!? Let’s go tell my mom—”

“I’m kidding.”

The twins burst out into laughter.

“Did you really believe that?” Dazai chuckled, “I’m just messing with you.”

Ron’s mouth dropped open and his brows drew together in something like a mix of amusement and irritation. “ Wha —then what really happened?”

Fred and George finally wandered over from the end of the aisle, wearing matching looks of humor. If there was an undertone of concern in their eyes, Dazai didn’t pay it much attention. “Did Snape do that? Wouldn’t surprise me!” Fred asked.

“Oh! I wonder if a dragon got loose somewhere—”

“There are dragons around here?” Dazai interrupted , blinking amicably at George.

“Ah, guess not. Well, what did happen, then?”

Dazai waved them off (as best he could, with six textbooks in hand). People were only ever good for overreacting—back home, Mori would have just rolled his eyes and pulled out the bandages. “Who knows.” He replied evenly. “There could be a stab-happy criminal around here. You wouldn’t know.”

Ron raised a brow. “So are you kidding or not?”

Beside him, Fred and George shared a look. Whatever passed between them, Dazai wasn’t sure, but it wasn’t a look of amusement.

If only Dazai had someone he could silently communicate with like that... Maybe if he works on this Ron kid enough he can have a subordinate that picks up on telepathic cues!

“I’m always kidding.” He said instead, laughing easily. “That Ollivander guy wanted my blood for something.”

Three pairs of eyes blinked back at him.

“For, y’know ,” Dazai adds, “a wand. Unless he’s a vampire. Are vampires real?”

“Yes?” Ron answered. “Don’t you know that?”

“Now that you mention it, Snape is pretty bat-like—”

Dazai reached for another book, only rolling his eyes when Ron suddenly startled.

“ Wa it—are you a muggle?!”

“You sound surprised.” He snorted, then considered the question by glancing back at Ron, “Is that such a bad thing?”

“No! Well...”

George chuckled lightly. “I mean, ‘Dazai’ isn’t exactly a well-known family name for wizards.”

“Right! Didn’t you notice, Little Brother?”

“I—he could be from a well-known foreign family!”

Dazai stifled a choked out laugh at that. Was the mafia like a family? Port Mafia *was* a famous name back home. Well, infamous. While Ron continued to flap his arms around noisily, Dazai mused over how strangely accurate the boy’s guess was.

He’d make a good subordinate yet. If only they could work on that telepathy...

Ron caught his eye and stopped bickering with the twins haltingly.

Encouraged, Dazai narrowed his eyes, nearly glaring a hole into the red-head and thinking, *go find my last book, go find my last book, go find my last book—*

“ What?” Ron squeaked, flinching back a step, “Why are you looking at me like that?”

Was the thought too complicated? *Book, book, book, book—*

“ Scary!”

At his twin’s declaration, Fred put on the look of a hardened detective, leaning in close to Dazai’s face. “He’s really upset about that muggle thing, Ickle Ronnikins ... have you considered apologizing?”

“What for?!”

Dazai blinked. “I’m not mad.”

“Then what are you doing..?”

He waved them off, sighing too-loud and shrugging off to the other bookshelf. “Never mind.” They’ll have to work on it. Or maybe this subordinate is no good. Either way... “Ah! Here’s my last book.”

“Wait, wait, wait!”

Dazai quirked his head sideways.

“You can’t just say Ollivander wanted your blood and leave it at that!” Ron gasped, “That’s not a normal thing!”

“For a wand!”

Fred and George chuckled. “Your new friend is mysterious, Ron!”

Grinning sloppily, Dazai allowed himself a small laugh at the Weasleys’ antics. He opened his mouth to speak when a shadow suddenly fell over him. Immediately, Ron straightened and cleared his throat. At his side, the twins also perked up. Dazai himself felt a breath catch in his throat and his mouth go cold. Who—?!

“Professor!” Fred greeted. “How lucky we are to see you here today!”

“Indeed.” Snape replied in a low voice, looking down at Dazai. “I see you didn’t wander off.”

Dazai glanced up faux-lazily, brow raised and still reeling from being caught off-guard. He lifted the books mutely. “Did you finish your secret side-quest, Sir?”

“What did I say about asking questions?”

“Right.” Dazai hummed.

(When he returned to Mori’s home, Dazai cleaned and re-wrapped the fresh wound with his eyes closed. Looking at the raised cemetery of marks there would only make him sick.)

Angel

Chapter Summary

CW: mori being a creep

there's a major plot hole in this chapter but we're just not going to talk about it

Chapter Notes

why is so much of this chapter just dialogue lmao

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dazai whined, rolling onto his back and tossing a textbook aside. “Please. I’m begging you. Shut up for five minutes.”

“*Hoot!”*

“ I’m trying to focus, you know.”

“*Hoot, hoot !”*

He groaned, planting both hands over his eyes in bitter defeat. Lazily sitting up, Dazai glared down the charcoal-colored owl preening on his dresser. It barely spared him a glance before *hooting* once more.

Dazai fixed the skirt of his dress. “I could kill you. Mori wouldn’t blame me—I'll just tell him it’s a wizard thing. Or—or I could throw you in a dumpster and tell him you flew away.”

It blinked. “*Hoot!”*

“... you’re right. He would never fall for that.”

Dazai pouted when the owl only continued to clean itself. “I don’t even need an owl. Aren’t you just here to make reading difficult, then?”

“Actually, the owl is how we’ll be communicating, Dazai. Please refrain from killing it.”

Mori waved amicably at the doorway.

“Even worse.” Dazai said, picking his book back up. “When did you get back, anyway?”

“I see you’re wearing one of the dresses I got for you.” The doctor said, completely disregarding the annoyed glare Dazai sent him at being ignored. “I’ll admit I’m a bit surprised! Usually I have to force you into such cute outfits!”

“I’m just being proactive.”

Mori raised a brow. Dazai noted with a frown that the doctor looked amused regardless. “Oh? How’s that?”

“I’m skipping the part where you ask to dress me up and I try to stab you in the thigh.”

Mori hummed. “Ah? But you don’t try to stab me when we play dress-up!”

Dazai rolled his eyes. “That takes a lot of self-control.” He looked away, glaring two angry holes into the owl. “I’m too tired for that right now, so I won’t be holding back if you try anything.”

“...Thank you for your consideration.” He cleared his throat. “So? How was your day-trip with that professor?”

“Fine... are you sure I can’t get rid of this thing?”

The owl *hooted*.

“Look who it is!”

“Snape’s favorite student is here!”

Ah, Dazai knew those voices. He glanced away from the bustling station, squinting at the large print “9” and “10” with a pout. “Fred, George. Fancy seeing you here.”

Fred chuckled. “Been standing here awhile, actually.”

“Mom’s getting emotional about sending Ron off. Only one kid left, after him.”

Dazai glanced behind the twins, where Mrs. Weasley fussed over Ron—mussing up his hair and holding him tight. The mafioso snorted at the affectionate gesture.

“Is Snape not with you again?”

“He doesn’t know how to take a joke.” Dazai said lightly. “I think he’s fed up with me.”

The twins laughed. After a second, they started walking back towards the other Weasleys, so Dazai followed with a lazy gait.

“Hello, Mrs. Weasley. Ron.” The mafioso greeted.

“Oh, hello dear.” When she pulled off of Ron, the boy shot Dazai a look like he had just parted the sea. “Have you got all your things?”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Dazai beamed.

Ron took a quick few steps toward Dazai until they were side-by-side. He shot a wary glance toward Mrs. Weasley’s open arms. “Great! Dazai here’s been very worried about getting a seat on the train so we’ll be going now!”

“I have been?”

“Yes! Bye Mom! Bye Ginny!”

Fred and George broke out laughing as their younger brother started pushing Dazai through the false wall.

Dragged along, Dazai stumbled when—instead of smashing into brick—he fell straight through. There was a brief moment of disorientation, followed by Dazai’s wide eyes searching all around the station. The train was surrounded by dozens of young wizards and their families. However, he only had a second to look over everyone before Ron was guiding him onto the train. Dazai let himself be dragged from one compartment to the next.

Finally, Ron pulled open a compartment door and promptly fell into an empty seat. “Thanks, man.” He said, breathing heavily. Dazai set his things down and took the seat across from Ron with practiced casualness.

He blinked. “For helping you avoid your family? No problem.”

“Yeah. Mom can be really overbearing sometimes... And don’t get me started on those hideous sweaters.”

“Sweaters?” Dazai fished around his suitcase for a book. After a moment of silent consideration, he pulled *Magical Drafts and Potions* onto his lap. Maybe he could brew a poison to drink.

“Every Christmas.” Ron whined. He watched Dazai flip through the book before saying, “Are your folks not like that, then?”

He glanced up from an entry on Herbicide Potion, smiling slightly. He tried to envision Mori or his father knitting a sweater. “Not exactly.”

Ron pulled a face. “That’s right. They weren’t at Diagon Alley, either.”

Dazai waved off the suspicion with a stray hand. “Mori is busy and I can’t stand him, so it’s not a big deal.”

“…right. Rotten luck getting stuck with Snape, then.” Ron said, expression taught like wire. “You call your dad by his name?”

“Sure.”

Below them, the train started to shift and move. The red-head cleared his throat. “Say, you’ve got a pet, haven’t you?”

“Oh, right.” he hummed, pulling a face. “I’ve got an owl.”

“An owl! Lucky you, all I’ve got it this pathetic rat!” From out of his pocket, Ron withdrew a sickly-looking black rat. It sat deathly still in the boy’s hands and blinked up two wide, violet eyes at Dazai.

“What’s a rat going to do for you?” He asked in reply. When Dazai reached out to pat the sorry-looking thing on the head, it scurried up Ron’s arm to sit on his shoulder. “Can’t carry any letters.”

“You’ve got that one right. I was going to ask for an owl this year, but got stuck with this thing instead.”

Dazai watched the rat, and the rat watched him back. What intelligent eyes for such a pathetic creature!

“Used to have another rat named Scabbers, but he up and died last month. Just my luck this one shows up and won’t leave my side! Dad said I didn’t need an owl since Angel is so attached to me.”

“Angel?”

“His name—my sister Ginny named ‘im.” Ron tried to flick the rat on his side, but Angel jumped out of the way. “Not much of an angel if you ask me. Looks a bit like a skeleton.”

“Ah, you really wanted that owl, huh? Well, he’s kind of cute, I guess.”

“Cute!? You’re only saying that ‘cause you got an owl!”

Dazai felt his expression tighten and vague memories of his stupid owl screeching washed over him. “Something like that.”

Grumbling, Ron leaned forward in his seat as if the jealously was breaking him. “You’ll have to let me see your owl sometime, mate. Maybe if it sends my folks a letter, they’ll realize what I’m missing out on... say, what sort of owl is it?”

“Ah, it’s just a regular owl. Noisy thing.”

“Right...” Ron shot him an almost disappointed look. “Well, that’s you, I guess. You get that arm looked at? Mom was worried sick when the twins and I told her.”

“All healed up, unfortunately.”

“Unfortunate?”

“Sure,” Dazai said, drumming his fingers on the potions book with an amiable smile. “Bleeding out seems like a pleasant way to die! *Unfortunately,* the wound wasn’t fatal.”

Ron blinked, then blinked again. “You can’t want to die.” His nose scrunched up, creasing a wrinkle into his brow. “You’re joking, right?”

“A pure, cheerful, and energetic suicide—those are the words I live by.”

Ron’s mouth opened to say something. *Probably something tedious*, Dazai thought mutely. However, before the pale boy could say anything of worth, the compartment door slid open.

“Anything off the trolley, dears?”

Dazai blinked up lazily to see a gentle-looking woman at the doorway. She was pushing a cart filled to full-capacity with sweets.

“No thanks. I’m all set.” Ron replied. Despite his polite demeanor, however, Dazai noted a distinct melancholy in the way he held his packed lunch.

Puffing out a breath, Dazai rooted around in his pockets for coins. “I’ll take something. Hey, Ron, what’s good here?”

“Anything but Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans! George reckons he had a bogey-flavored one once.”

Dazai quirked a brow, then returned to his selection. “One of those frog-looking things then. *Chocolate frogs*?”

“Good choice.” Ron pouted, casting eyes at the sweets he couldn’t afford. “Be careful, or else it’ll hop away!”

Trading off his coins for the frog, Dazai waved the trolley-lady goodbye until she slid the door shut behind her. “Is that a normal thing? Candy that runs away?”

“Just for these ones. Well—go on! Open it!”

With a chuckle, Dazai complied easily. However, before he could reach in and pull out his treat, a little brown frog crawled out onto the wrapper.

“It’s kind of cute!” Dazai preened. “Does it squirm when you eat it?”

“Don’t talk! Catch it—!”

Suddenly, the frog bounded off of Dazai’s lap, hopping directly onto Ron’s shoulder. The ginger flailed. Despite both boys reaching for the chocolate, it was Angel who caught it—trapped beneath two flimsy, skeleton-thin paws. The black rat blinked lazily down at its captive prey.

“Hey! Get off that! That isn’t yours, stupid rat.”

He shook his head, pulling a face. “Ah, never mind... you can keep it. I don’t know where that rat of yours has been.”

“...Are you sure, mate?”

“Positive.”

Ron beamed, prying the chocolate out from underneath Angel by giving the rat a flick on its side. In his grip, the frog went limp. “They only really have one good hop in them.” He explained, popping it into his mouth with a certain glee, “T’anks... wha’ cawd du ge’?”

“What on Earth are you saying.”

Ron swallowed the chocolate down and cleared his throat. “What card did you get? Chocolate frogs come with a collectible.”

Dazai sighed, somehow managing to keep the disgusted look off his face. Before Ron could be a good subordinate, he’d have to learn a few manners first! Until then... He picked the frog’s container up and squinted down at it. “Oh! That old guy is here.”

“*Dumbledore.”* Ron corrected, voice pitching a bit. “I’ve got about six of him.”

“...Want to make it seven?”

“No.”

“Oh—”

“Has anyone seen a toad?”

Dazai’s playful expression froze in place when a third voice interrupted from the doorway. At the entryway, a young girl with thick, curly hair frowned down at them, eyes searching. At his side, Dazai noticed Ron shoot him a peeved look at the interruption.

“A boy named Neville’s lost one.” She finished.

Ron’s face scrunched up. “No.”

Dazai shrugged, trying for a passive look. He was starting to think he’d been too quick to judge his stupid owl as a bad pet if everyone else was going around with *rats* and *toads.* Still... “Are you sure he’s just not seeing it? I bet toads are a quiet, respectable pet! The type that doesn’t hoot when you’re trying to read.”

The girl’s eyes widened somewhat, landing on the open book on Dazai’s lap. “Getting ahead in your studies? *I’ve* already read through all the first-year books, you know. But I guess it can’t hurt to start now.” Grinning, she stuck out her hand. “I’m Hermione Granger! And who are you two, then?”

“Ron Weasely.” The red-head said, taking her hand and shaking it. Despite the pleasantry, he wore an expression closer to annoyance than anything else.

“...Pleasure.”

Dazai smiled, taking Hermione’s hand in his own. He raised it to his lips, relishing in the way she flushed scarlet immediately. “Dazai Osamu.” Meeting her blown eyes, he added, “Would you like to commit a double suicide with me, my lady?”

“W-what?!”

Ron chuckled under his breath, and Hermione scrambled back into the doorway. “He’s joking.” he clarified, smiling with a pinched expression, “...You’re joking, right?”

“I mean...”

“He’s joking.” Ron said again, more harshly this time.

Hermione glanced between the two boys, face still tinted red at the edged. She swallowed. “Y-you two better get changed into your robes. I expect we’ll be arriving soon.”

She quickly departed, and Dazai smirked at her flustered exit. Beside him, Ron raised a brow. “You shouldn’t joke about things like that, Dazai! Besides, it’s not right to tease a girl like that!”

“She’ll be fine! Besides, I thought she might appreciate a grand, romantic gesture. That’s how you make friends, isn’t it?”

“You can’t be serious.”

Dazai shrugged. He took the book from his lap and returned it to his suitcase with a certain regret at not being able to read it. Now that he thought about it... Ron was really no better than his owl, right? Neither would shut up when he was trying to work. At least his owl could deliver mail—although the messages would be from Mori, so maybe Ron *was* the superior pet.

Brushing off Ron’s befuddled gaze, the bandaged boy rustled around in his suitcase until he could find his school robes. Seeming to take that as a cue to get moving, Ron stood. Angel’s little claws tightened on Ron’s sleeve at the sudden movement, drawing a snort from Dazai.

“A toad...” Dazai hummed, glancing at the black rat. “...Almost as useless as a rat.”

Angel stared at him with amethyst eyes that almost looked humored. Somehow, Dazai was almost convinced the black rat was smiling.

“...Wanna trade? I’ll take your owl, you take Angel?”

“No way. Besides, I refuse to call that thing an angel. It’s glaring at me—see?”

Ron blinked, twisting his neck to get a better look. “What are you on about? He’s dumb, not evil!”

“I don't know. It definitely stepped on that chocolate frog just so I couldn’t have any.”

“...Right.”

Any creature with eyes that sharp wasn’t fit to be called Angel. Maybe the name Demon was more apt.

Chapter End Notes

that's just a regular rat u guys i promise

thanks for reading! see yall next Saturday :)
and thanks for commenting!!! i would die for all of you
side note for this whole fic: some of the dialogue is ripped straight from the HP movies. mostly just applies to some stuff at the beginning of this fic tho

The Sorting Hat

Chapter Summary

After six chapters, Dazai finally makes it to the school.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai's thin fingers tugged on the edges of his cloak until Ron shot him a dirty look.

"...What?"

"Quit fidgeting! You're going to tear a hole in that and we haven't even made it in the school yet, you know."

"You don't think the cloaks are weird?" Dazai huffed, tucking his bandaged arms behind his back with a childish sound. "What are they adding to the learning experience?"

"It's a school uniform."

"It's not *practical."*

And really, it's *not.* Ever since he put the damn thing on, Dazai had been imagining all the different ways wearing a cloak was more of a hazard than anything else. For instance: what if he's running away from someone? It would be too easy for them to grab at his cloak and drag him back! When he tried explaining this to Ron, however, his no-good subordinate-in-training had only replied with:

"Why are you planning to be chased? Just calm down, mate."

It's hard to find a good subordinate these days.

Ron rolled his eyes, all but pushing Dazai off the train. It was dark when they un-boarded, and Dazai silently mourned how much time he wasted talking to his classmates instead of gathering information. Still, when he hopped off the train a step ahead of Ron, Dazai couldn't help but feel a tickle of excitement shoot up his spine.

It's a strange feeling and not one he'd ever want to voice aloud: Dazai doesn't really get out much. For maybe the first time in forever, his bedroom door is unlocked and no one is watching his every move. Mori wants him here for a reason, of course—but that old doctor isn't here *now,* so there's nothing wrong with enjoying this freedom a bit, right?

It’s not like anyone back home has to know that for maybe the first time in forever Dazai is feeling a positive emotion.

“ *Woah!”*

Dazai blinked back to attention, immediately tracking Ron’s awed voice to the hulking figure before them. The man stood more than twice Dazai’s height and three times as wide.

“’Right then!” The man boomed, startling some of the students around them, “First years, this way please!”

Feeling rather pleased with himself for not flinching at the shout, Dazai barely noticed Ron shoot him an eager grin. Ron immediately trailed after the large fellow who had called for them like a dog to its master. With a raised brow, Dazai followed his subordinate lamely.

“This way to the boats—follow me!”

“Boats?” Dazai half-whispered to Ron.

The red-head shrugged, bounding along the path. “We take boats across the lake to school, ‘s what I hear.” After a quick look to Dazai, he added, “Just the first years, though. My brother said after that we take horseless carriages over.”

As he spoke, Ron seamlessly guided he and Dazai into a rickety old boat. Dazai regarded the thing critically before shrugging and taking his seat. If it broke apart and they drowned... well, that wasn’t really a bad thing, right? Anyway, a quick glace to that large, bearded fellow proved the boats could handle a little weight. Dazai was almost disappointed to realize they *wouldn’t* be drowning this afternoon.

Wishful thinking.

He didn’t voice this thought aloud, however. Mori had warned him against being too obvious about his willingness to die, and although Dazai couldn’t care less about what that man had to say, he did see the merit in hanging around a bit longer. At the very least, he wanted to enjoy just one day without some mafioso breathing down his neck.

An orange-looking lantern laid out on the boat and Dazai mindlessly took it and held it over their heads. It wavered only slightly when two complete strangers boarded the boat behind them. Actually—not strangers. The busy-haired girl from earlier was there! Their eyes met, shining in the swing of his lantern.

“Oh! You don’t mind if we sit here, do you? This is Neville Longbottom. I told you about him earlier.”

A quiet look passed between him and Ron, and Dazai got the impression the red-head didn’t appreciate Hermione's appearance. Dazai waved him off with a bandaged hand.

“Fellow with the lost toad, yeah?” He hummed.

“Y-you’ve seen Trevor?!”

“No, no. I was just thinking... is that a good pet? I bet it’s not as annoying as an owl.”

Neville stared at him, wide-eyed. Without warning, Ron elbowed him in the side, earning him a pout. Dazai put a hand on his side, whining, “What was that for?!”

“Never mind that—look!”

Dazai stared out over the water as the towering castle came into view. Hogwarts was a castle! Okay... that was kind of cool. Oppressive towers and peaks made the horizon, lit only by a thousand open windows. This sort of place was nothing like the cityscape of Yokohama! It was a strange, rustic place, and Dazai felt like he was sailing into the distant past—a place of kings and queens. Still, Dazai was nothing if not an expert at schooling his expression, and for some reason gaping open-mouthed (like the rest of these brats) seemed like a concession. So Dazai kept his face carefully blank, sparing only the briefest looks of curiosity at such a magical sight.

Suddenly, Dazai felt the base of his skull buzz with energy. Was *No Longer Human* activating? He didn’t think anyone was using an ability on him... but this had happened at Diagon Alley too, hadn’t it? Something about the air itself was alive with the same power as an ability.

Magic?

Maybe this Hogwarts trip *would* be interesting, even with Mori’s stupid, secret plan at play.

Dazai breathed out a silent sigh, feeling the beginnings of a headache come on. He was almost relieved when they finally docked on the other side of the lake, if only just because seeing the other students so awed by Hogwarts was distantly annoying.

Tossing the lantern aside, Dazai readjusted quickly to having solid earth below him once again. Beside him, Ron, Hermione, and Neville stumbled a bit at the difference. Ron shot him a not-so subvert glare when Dazai offered nothing more than a chuckle as help.

“Off you go, then.” Their guide waved two large hands toward what Dazai assumed to be the school entrance. “Head up the stairs and Professor McGonagall will see you to the Great Hall for sorting.”

His boat-mates shared eager looks and hurried after the crowd. Dazai ambled after them lazily, propping his arms up behind his head and offering a passive look. A few steps behind them, Dazai took his time up the stairs, mutely wondering over the ornate stairway. Abruptly, the trio he was following came to a stop. Dazai glared at the backs of their heads when he stumbled a bit. That’s what he gets for letting his mind wander! At least none of these other punks bumped into him.

Blinking around Ron’s back, Dazai finally understood why they had stopped. An older-looking woman stood at the top of the stairs (McGonagall, his mind supplied helpfully). She wore a long cloak and a pointed hat that Dazai felt was a bit excessive, and between her crossed hands was a long, pointed wand.

“Welcome to Hogwarts.” The professor called in a voice cracked with age and wear, “Now, in a few moments you will pass through these doors and join your classmates. But before you can take your seats, you must be sorted into your houses.”

Ron looked to his side as if to say something, but instead found himself looking at the banister. He offered a startled look to the rail before sighing and stepping half-a-pace to the right. “Dazai!” He whisper-yelled, “Why are you back there?”

Raising a brow, Dazai took his place beside Ron. “I’m following.”

“Wh—”

A glare from McGonagall stole the protestation from Ron’s mouth. A few nervous chuckles filled the air around them at the silent scolding, and Dazai watched in vague amusement as the red-head withdrew into himself slightly.

“They are Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff,” her voice took on a dangerous edge, “and Slytherin.”

The houses—Dazai had done the barest amounts of research on them. He didn’t have a mind for arbitrary divisions; however, he got the impression house loyalties were *very* important to some of these other brats (if the chattering behind him was any indication). At the end of the day, Dazai’s loyalty could never lie with any of these houses—or even Hogwarts for that matter. But none of these kids had to know he was only loyal to the mafia. Besides, he thought clarifying that was probably more trouble than it was worth.

“Now while you’re here, your house will be like your family.”

Ugh , he hoped not.

After that, Dazai stopped paying attention. Instructions were *boring.* It was just schooling, anyhow, so Dazai didn’t anticipate being too out of his depth. Instead, he let his mind wander.

That tickling feeling in his brain hadn’t settled—if anything, it had gotten more noticeable. He was sure of it: magic and abilities must be fundamentally the same concepts. *No Longer Human* was working itself too hard trying to nullify all of the potent energy in the room with the same force it would if he were touching an ability user. Honestly, it was all a bit tiring. Unfortunately, Dazai was nearly convinced that magic was some sort of non-localized ability. He’d probably just have to get used to it. All the more evidence towards Dazai’s theory that he could not, in fact, utilize magic. Stupid Mori.

Dazai was distantly aware of that Longbottom kid finding his toad. Much to Dazai’s displeasure, the annoying little thing was making an obnoxious series of squeaking croaks. So much for a quiet pet. There’s no such thing as a good pet, probably. They’re all horrible little things and wizards should learn how to use a cell phone—

“Oi! We’re going in!”

Dazai turned a lazy glare to Ron, who elbowed him sharply in the side. “I’m going to bruise if you keep that up. If you’re going to hit me, at least be trying to kill me.”

Ron rolled his eyes, taking a hold of Dazai’s sleeve and tugging him up the final stair and through two large, open doors. “We’re about to be sorted! Aren’t you excited? I’ve got to be in Gryffindor, y’know. Where do you reckon you’ll be?”

“Hm? Depends, which one is your least favorite?”

“Slytherin.” The boy responded seriously, drawing a dull look from Dazai. “No good snakes. They’re all Death Eaters. Oh—you're a muggle born. Death Eaters are—”

“Shh!” someone hushed.

Dazai felt his mouth clamp shut at the whispered command. It was probably for the best, anyway, considering Ron was about to explain a terrorist organization to him on the way to the Great Hall.

Once the Great Hall came into view, even Dazai couldn’t pretend he wasn’t a little excited. Candles floated in the air, held aloft by nothing by what must have been magic. Above them, the ceiling wasn’t a ceiling at all—instead, it was a clouded night sky. Dazai almost made to ask why he couldn’t feel a breeze if the roof was open, but on closer inspection could faintly see the beams and bars of a peaked ceiling. Was it a spell? What a useless thing to magic up! Although in the end, Dazai could recognize the view as somewhat impressive.

McGonagall lead her group to a complete stop at the front of the massive room just before... a hat? Dazai briefly let himself inspect the beat-up old hat before passing his eyes over the bigger threat. Up against the far wall was a long, horizontal table packed tightly with adults. Dazai picked Dumbledore and Snape out amongst the fifteen-or-so other people up there, and deduced those must be other professors and staff. Oh! That guy from the Leaky Cauldron with the turban was here too—small world. Seeing them all lined up... Dazai squared his shoulders and felt his hands go a bit cold.

He didn’t like the idea they were watching him. Clearly they were more experienced in magic than him. That made them dangerous—a threat. That buzzing feeling in his skull persisted, but now it was screaming *get out get out getout getoutgetoutgetout!*

Dazai stuck his heels in the floor and bit his cheek.

Ron elbowed him in the side again, but his brows were drawn together tightly in an expression Dazai didn’t bother to identify. His side stinging, Dazai suddenly found his head clearing a bit. He shouldn’t be so afraid—Dazai didn’t *do* afraid. Still, he couldn’t deny that odd sort of dread at being surrounded by people— *adults*— who could easily overpower him. He’d blame Mori for it, since the doctor forced him to come to this stupid school in the first place.

From the other side of that long table, Dumbledore rose to his feet. Dazai found himself similarly rising to attention.

“I have a few start of term notices I wish to announce.” He paused, “The first years please note that the Dark Forest is strictly forbidden to all students. Also, our caretaker, Mr. Filch would like to remind you that the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a most painful death.”

At the word ‘death’ Dazai perked up, eyes lighting with a mix of interest and eagerness. He bounced on his heels, already trying to imaging what sorts of things might be hidden on the third floor. Although he wasn’t too keen on a *painful* death per say, Dazai couldn’t fight the trill of excitement at the notion of dying on campus.

Beside him, Ron must have picked up on Dazai’s barely restrained longing for death, because the Weasely shot him an indescribable look that he was choosing to translate as support.

“Thank you.” The headmaster finished simply. Feeling a bit anti-climactic, Dazai rolled on the balls of his heels as if to shake off some loose energy.

“Now,” McGonagall spoke once Dumbledore was seated once more, “when I call your name, you will come forth, I shall place the sorting hat on your head, and you will be sorted into your houses.” Without further affair, she held the hat aloft.

“Abbott, Hannah!”

Dazai allowed himself to watch the girl take a seat on the stool, very interested in just what this hat would do. The wrinkled, old hat fell slightly over Hannah’s eyes. He squinted up at the hat, trying to figure out what it might do, only to stare, dumbfounded, as the frayed edges of the pointed hat opened up in a facsimile of a mouth.

“HUFFLEPUFF!”

The hat... talked? Dazai felt a grin break out onto his face, finding the useless little things wizards poured their magic into vaguely amusing. He watched with empty humor as student-after-student was sorted into their respective houses, but it wasn’t long until McGonagall was calling,

“Dazai, Osamu!”

There was a momentary pause in applause for the previous student, and Dazai took his cue to step forward. Someone gave him a pat on the back—Dazai took a guess on it being Ron—seeming not to care for the flinch that rocked his body in return.

Dazai took a seat in front of the thousand eyes in the room. He felt their attention ten-fold weigh down on him as he rearranged his limbs to rest limply on his lap (*like a doll on display* , he thought unhelpfully). All of the professors were watching him too, which was all the threat Dazai needed to sit *perfectly still.*

Ah—the hat would work on him, right?

Above him, McGonagall held the hat over top his chocolate hair, expression blank and practiced. Belatedly, he thought to shut his eyes—it wouldn’t do to have the musty hat fall

over his eyes like that other girl.

There was a prolonged moment of silence, followed by the sound of cloth rustling, then:

“SLYTHERIN!”

Chapter End Notes

I feel like before we get much further into this fic I should clarify that I'm taking some uhhhhhh liberties with how magic works. Also there are a few characters where I thought, "they won't be very important, so I'm only going to skim the Wiki" but here I am twenty chapters later and.... anyway just don't think about it too much lol

See y'all next week! I've got a pretty busy June but I have plenty of buffer chapters so we'll be fine! Thanks for reading!!
enjoy or don't

Snakes

Chapter Summary

Dazai settles in at Hogwarts.

(Warning for Harry Potter typical magic-racism)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai's eyes shot open. The... the hat hadn't even touched him! It was still held a foot above him in McGonagall's hand! Blinking owlishly, Dazai turns to face the professor, however, she wore a look equally as surprised as him. And the hat—was it moving? Fighting against McGonagall's grip? It almost looked like the Sorting Hat was straining to get away from him.

Not great, he thought, feeling his spine tense up as McGonagall continued to stare straight into him.

Clearing the expression from his face, Dazai turned emptily back to the tables lined out before him and stood. Almost unconsciously, Dazai sought out Ron in the crowd of other first years, but couldn't seem to meet the boy's eyes.

He was nearly sitting down before someone thought to clap.

Was it really so odd, the hat not touching his head? It *was* pretty far away when it determined his house fate... and could the others see how hard the hat had fought to stay away from touching him? Oh well. It's not like Dazai cared, so that made it... a problem for Mori?

That sounded good.

It felt even better to be sitting down at the tables and out of everyone's attention.

He was distantly aware of Hermione, Ron, and Neville all being sorted into Gryffindor, and felt a slight sting at the thought of his three potential subordinates being sorted differently to him. He'd have to make more allies in Slytherin, although having some connections to the other houses couldn't hurt. He had a feeling those Weasley twins wouldn't be hard to train, either. Ah... he didn't seem to be lacking in Gryffindor support, then.

The only other thing that vaguely captured his interest was the sorting of some kid named Draco Malfoy. Just like with Dazai, although to a much weaker extent, the sorting hat had declared, "SLYTHERIN" before ever really touching the boy's head.

“Let the feast begin!”

Dazai let the announcement shake him from his thoughts. He was further startled from his musings when the table—just empty seconds before—became flooded with various dinner foods. A basket a bread, a full chicken, corn-on-the-cob… Dazai’s head was spinning with all the options. The sudden overwhelming smell of cooked meats was noxious. Dazai had never been able to handle the smell of food and it was putting his stomach off before he’d even began.

“Aren’t you going to eat… uh, Dazai?”

Blinking to attention, Dazai smiled aimlessly at the tight-faced girl beside him. Looking at her plate, Dazai concluded she must have been building a tower of ham with how tall the plate was stacked.

“Don’t bother him, Pansy. He’s probably used to *much* classier foods than whatever garbage the Hogwarts house elves can come up with. Did you see how quickly the hat sorted him? Just like me—a *true* Slytherin.”

Draco Malfoy grinned sharply at him over the table. The boy’s hair was so pale, Dazai juggled between calling it white or blonde before eventually settling on that he didn’t really care. After a moment, Draco seemed to have made some sort of silent judgment on Dazai and he stuck his hand out open-palmed in greeting.

“Malfoy. Draco Malfoy.”

Dazai regarded the hand for a second before sighing and shaking the hand. “Dazai… you some sort of rich brat then?”

You can’t make allies by insulting people, part of Dazai’s brain hissed in a voice disturbingly like Mori’s, *please don’t just say whatever it is you’re thinking in that misguided little brain of yours.*

Then come here and do it yourself, stupid doctor.

Immediately, Draco’s grin slipped into a sneer. “Don’t you know who I am? The *Malfoy* family is far more powerful than whatever wizarding family you come from.”

Mentally, Dazai weighed this Malfoy estate against the Port Mafia and came up with a very different conclusion than Draco had. He hated to admit it, but the echo of Mori’s voice was *probably* right—he needed allies. Especially ones who were apparently well-connected in the wizarding world. At least he’d probably have more fun that way rather than just isolating himself.

“ *Dazai…* ” another voice wondered, “I don’t think I’ve ever heard that name before. Are you even from a wizarding family?”

Dazai made a face, waving a bandaged hand around vaguely.

“Oh, *Merlin!* Are you a muggleborn ?!”

“A *muggle?”* Draco gaped. “In *Slytherin?!”*

Dazai smiled colorlessly. “Seems that way. Can you pass the crab?”

“You must be mistaken. That type of person isn’t welcome in Slytherin.”

“Take it up with the hat.”

Around the table, a mix of expressions bore down on Dazai. Some of them were wide-eye—looking a bit startled at his off-hand, unconcerned demeanor. However, most of the other snakes glared him down with an indescribable vitriol to their gaze. Maybe he’d have been worried, but Dazai had seen glares worse than these children’s.

“Well,” a dark-skinned, plain-looking boy piped up, voice wilting as he spoke, “The hat *did* seem to think he was Slytherin. It called our house out before Professor McGonagall was even close to putting it on him, after all.”

Draco’s upper lip pulled at the corner. “Still, Blaise, a *mudblood* in Slytherin! It must have made some sort of mistake. After all, what sort of impression did the hat get if it didn’t even touch him? I say we make Dumbledore sort him again.”

It took a great deal of effort, but Dazai restrained himself from rolling his eyes. Instead, he reached out for a plate of crab, excessively pleased to have found something edible for dinner. He took a bite while the others bickered.

“Didn’t it barely touch you too, Malfoy?”

Everyone at the table froze, staring wide-eyed at Dazai, who only waved a crab leg around in response.

“I mean, it’s only fair. Maybe you’ll be Gryffindor next time.” He’d pegged a rivalry between the two houses earlier thanks to Ron. Despite how little it meant to Dazai, these kids seemed to be *very* strongly motivated by showing the other houses up. They didn’t bother to hide it, which made bullying these brats too easy. “Hey, maybe we’ll be housemates again after we fix the Sorting Hat’s mistake. Hm?”

“Don’t you call me one of those no-good Gryffindors!”

“Oh my god, you’re so serious.” Dazai snorted.

“I saw him talking with a Weasley earlier,” Pansy tacked on helpfully.

Speaking of Weasley… Dazai bent his neck to see around the other tables to the Gryffindor students on the other side. They needed to work on their telepathy! How he was supposed to train a subordinate when they weren’t roomed together was looking to be a bit challenging, but Dazai had done more with far less in the past. He wasn’t really worried about the house divisions keeping them apart—after all, a dog always comes back to its master.

Is this what kids these days called ‘friendship?’

Malfoy's sharp voice interrupted his musings. "Hanging out with that blood traitor, too ?"

Blood traitor? How curious! Wizards sure had a lot of terms and classifications for one another that mostly seemed to benefit infighting… It was all a bit boring, honestly. With that outburst hanging in the air, Dazai decided he was finished eating. He wasn't going to be able to stomach any more, despite that he'd barely eaten half-a-serving. When he pushed his plate away, Dazai noticed that Blaise kid giving him a curious look. He shrugged it off.

Dazai let himself zone quickly after that, growing bored of Draco trying to get a rise out of him and not being able to catch Ron's eyes over the crowd. He didn't peg Draco as a huge threat, nor did he find much motivation to sweet talk the brat. Maybe later, when Dazai's headache had settled he could deal with Malfoy, but for tonight it wasn't majorly important. It was just school, after all—it wasn't like he *needed* people to back him up for anything.

At some point, Dazai must have gotten lost in his thoughts, because he only became aware that the Great Hall was emptying out when Blaise put a hand on his shoulder.

"We're going to the dorms now." He said, voice displaying none of the vague humor Dazai read in his yes.

Around Blaise's shoulder, Pansy's obnoxious face popped up. "Draco wanted to leave you, so you should really be thanking us for staying behind."

Ugh. He hated being so spacey, but Dazai couldn't seem to keep his thoughts in one place. With all the strangers around he was feeling too wound up to focus. It was easier to just zone out than to catalog the hundreds of possible threats his brain was supplying.

Dangerous, his mind hissed, *keep your eye on the enemy, idiot.*

Shooting the girl a hollow look, Dazai carefully chose not to reply. He got to his feet and followed them to where the other Slytherins were gathered by the door. It wasn't long before the Slytherin pack was filing out of the Great Hall after the feet of who Dazai guessed to be prefects. Beside him, Pansy sped up to walk side-by-side with Draco, and with a parting glance Blaise joined her. Dazai let them go with little more than a raised brow.

Dazai trailed at the back of the group, trying to memorize the path they were taking, but got bored after the twentieth turn. He'd probably figure it out eventually. Instead, Dazai turned his attention to the weird things around Hogwarts. The walls were lined with paintings framed with gold and dark woods and filled with people and places Dazai wasn't familiar with. However, it quickly became apparent the people in the paintings were *moving* — staring down at the students, waving, *speaking.*

Dazai tried not to make eye-contact with any of the paintings. Just how alive were those painted people? He tried to envision what it must be like to live forever encased in oil paints and turpentine.

He was glad when they entered the dungeons, because the walls were empty and cracked. The way those painted people watched him filled Dazai's stomach with iron and lead.

Abruptly, the group comes to a stop. Dazai has to stand on his toes just to see their destination—an empty stone wall.

“The password is *Gillyweed* “ a young girl, the prefect, announced clearly, “It changes once every fortnight, so be sure to check the notice board inside, or else you’ll have to spend the night out here. First years—students from other houses are *not* welcome inside. Under no circumstances should you invite someone like that in. That includes sharing the password. Understand?”

A murmured agreement ran through the students.

“Good. Now, our head of house is Professor Snape. If you have any concerns, his office is just beyond that set of stairs there. Otherwise, we snakes stick together. Don’t hesitate to turn to each other for anything. That will be all. Now— *Gillyweed!”*

Though he had to peak around his peers, Dazai could hear the proceedings. The sound of stones moving followed by footsteps told Dazai some sort of passage had opened up. Frowning, he followed the last of the Slytherins through the doorway and into the common rooms. He considered the room with a dull look.

It was colder down here in the dungeons than it had been in the Great Hall, unfortunately. Dazai was the sort to catch a chill easily, and he already just wanted to hide under a blanket until someone came to put him out of his misery. He noted a fireplace on the far wall, which was a small mercy, really. Aside from the fireplace, Dazai thought the design seemed relatively opulent—green lights, leather sofas, a nice-looking chess set. Although he wasn’t sure green lanterns were especially practical for reading.

He could whine about it later. For now, Dazai was *tired.* Maybe it was whatever made *No Longer Human* activate constantly, but he felt like he’d been hit by a truck. Limbs heavy and expression drawn, Dazai immediately set off towards the dorms. It’s not like he cared to make nice with these snakes anyway.

As Dazai retreated to the dorms, he was distantly aware of Malfoy’s glare on his back—of everyone’s glare on him—but he was too busy deciding which bed to take to bother responding. He shut the dorm door behind him with only enough force to make the heavy door close properly.

He sat down on the bed furthest from the entrance and pulled his knees to his chest. All the other snakes were still in the Common Room—he could hear them chatting away excitedly through the door. They sounded happy, but Dazai couldn’t find it in himself to empathize with something pleasant like that. Instead, Dazai tried to imagine himself chatting with them. Even though he rarely left his room, Dazai was well trained in the art of socializing. He knew just what to say for every last one of these brats to fall in love with him—to follow his every command.

He sighed, drawing himself in tighter. Too many people—too much noise.

It was sort of odd—he'd be sleeping in the same room as these other kids. Dazai was so used to having a bedroom all to himself, he felt a bit on edge at the notion of doing otherwise.

Being surrounded by all these people already had him so on edge, but he didn't think locking the door would be enough to keep the others out for long.

With another breath, Dazai fell onto his back and closed his eyes.

Dazai was sitting on the Boss' desk, face empty and emotionless, not even moving when a crack of thunder shook the building. There was rain pounding on the window like it was asking for entrance, but no one would let it in. Instead, Dazai was forced to simply imagine what it would be like to drown then die for good. Having your head forced under water hurt, so it probably was a bad way to die.

Mori stood in the doorway, smiling pleasantly. He had a smile that was hard to define, so Dazai didn't bother. He couldn't decide if it was kind or malicious—most people around him didn't smile.

Dazai lived his entire life trapped between the four walls of the Mafia headquarters. A cold, steel barrier dotted with lies and crime. He thought it was a nice frame, but the paintings at Hogwarts had intricate ones made of pure gold. The people in those paintings were smiling as if their watercolor lives weren't worth living.

Mori waved him over and Dazai smiled like his face was drawn on.

(Those paintings on the walls were filled with living people, and Dazai understood them well.)

When Dazai woke from his dream, he did it with all the stillness of a corpse. His eyes slid open slowly, the movement casual enough not to give away his waking. When had he fallen asleep? He must have been more tired than he thought to fall asleep so carelessly when strangers were around. Just the idea made Dazai feel sick, so he turned his attention to something else.

Ah—the others must have come in at some point to sleep. The idea that these students were in here while he slept was horrifying, even if it seemed like no one had done any more than pass out, too. Dazai hadn't even woken up when they'd come in! He's never felt so unprotected before—or at least, not so unprepared to be this vulnerable.

Still, sleeping had cleared Dazai's head somewhat, though he could still feel that faint discomfort of his ability activating. It wasn't horrible, so Dazai just rolled his shoulders and

got started with his day. Now that there were others around, Dazai let that vacant smile appear on his face and willed his posture to look more confident and laid-back. He only ever let himself look so haunted and afraid when no one was around, after all .

Idly, he wondered what time it was. Dazai usually didn't sleep for long—or consistently—but it must have been at least a few hours for him to feel this well-rested.

Dazai changed into clean robes and cleaned up in the restroom before entering the common rooms with a book bag in tow. He replaced his old bandages without ever peeking at the skin below. It wouldn't do to look undone in front of these kids, and now that Dazai was working on a restful mind he was even more wary of Draco Malfoy. Last night he'd been feeling too overstimulated by all the people that he'd retreated almost immediately to the solitude of his room. Now that he had the mental capacity to consider, however, Malfoy *definitely* had a problem with him.

The brat might be fun to mess with. Hopefully Dazai would get used to all the buzz and energy around Hogwarts so he could scheme a bit more without feeling so wound up, yet simultaneously exhausted.

Just as Dazai settled into a plush chair right beside the lit fireplace, a noise startled him from his thoughts. Dazai felt his spine snap into place, but he kept his face neutral as he spun to see whoever was awake.

They met his eyes evenly and wore a curious frown.

"Young snake," they spoke. Dazai startled somewhat at the hollow, echoing way their voice sounded, "Did you know you have the strangest energy about you?"

"Ah..." Dazai tried for a smile. "Did *you* know you're covered in blood?

Chapter End Notes

I wrote this chapter ages ago lmao I don't remember what happens

anyway, I've had a couple (?) people ask if there are going to be any bsd characters in this fic and the answer is uhhhh technically. We'll see some of the other mafia characters eventually but not in year one (magic and mystery). I still haven't decided if I'm writing years 2+ yet tho.. Sorry if that's boring for y'all. : (

thanks for reading! Stay safe everyone < 3
Oh! I also wanted to specify that uhhhh you guys are going to think this fic is boring. It's a super boring fic. I don't know what I'm doing

Something About Ghosts

Chapter Summary

Dazai makes some friends... kind of.

CW: Probably just consider Wizard Racism and Suicide to apply to this whole fic, tbh.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The man standing in front of Dazai was quite the image, so Dazai took a moment to catalog just what exactly he was seeing: covered in blood, transparent, floating two feet off the ground...

“Ghost?” Dazai hazarded a guess.

“Yes, yes, that’s right.” The man said, “You may call me the Bloody Baron. As your house ghost—”

“House ghost, huh? That seems like a trivial thing to have.”

The Baron’s eyes narrowed and his gaunt face pulled tense. “Watch your tongue, boy.”

Dazai shrugged and readjusted on the armchair so that he was face-to-face with the Bloody Baron and his legs were dangling off the side. He squinted at the bloody wound the Baron wore. “That’s self-inflicted, right? Congratulations!”

“Wha—”

“Congrats on a successful suicide. Ah~ I’m jealous!”

With a whine, Dazai melted back into the armchair. He didn’t really peg this ghost as a threat —if anything, he pitied the poor man. Committing suicide but still being forced to live on as a ghost? Horrible! Sickening! He wanted to die more than ever, but he wanted to *stay dead* when he finally kicked the bucket. “Jealous and... wait, you wanted something didn’t you, Mr. Ghost?”

“ *Baron.”* He emphasized, practically spitting the retort. However, Dazai noted the lilt of shock in his tone in response to Dazai’s open appreciation towards suicide. The Baron seemed to shake himself, regarding the boy strangely and floating a tentative foot further

from him. “And *yes*, I did. You have quite the peculiar aura about you, young snake. I take it you didn’t realize?”

Dazai hummed, kicking his feet out childishly.

The ghost continued haltingly, “You see, as a ghost I’m especially aware of magical energies. Yet I get a strange feeling from you... it’s hard to say. Though I suppose if you don’t know, there’s no point in asking.”

Interesting... Sitting up a bit straighter, Dazai asked, “You can sense something like that, huh?”

To be fair, Dazai had figured that might be the case. After all, if *he* could feel the magic in the air, it stood the reason magic—and magical creatures—could feel him in return. Now it was just a question of what exactly they were sensing from him.

“That’s right. It’s as if—”

Suddenly, the boy’s dorm room door opened. Blaise stood in the doorway, blinking dully at the Baron and Dazai, as if silently asking what was happening. “Good morning Baron, Dazai.” He said after a moment.

The Bloody Baron cleared his throat and floated a few feet away from Dazai, smiling sheepishly. “Right. I’ll be leaving then. Good luck on your first day, young snakes.”

“Hey, we were talking, Mr. Ghost Guy. You can’t just leave like that!”

“*Baron.”* He drew out the pronunciation and floated towards the front wall. When the Baron started to phase through the stone face, he added, “And I’m sure we’ll be seeing each other around.”

With that, he phased fully through the wall, disappearing from sight completely. Dazai huffed, drawing his shoulders together with a frown. He’d have to track the Baron down later—things always worked out better when he had all the information, and Dazai didn’t like the idea that the ghost knew something about him he didn’t.

“Making friends with the house ghost? Interesting choice, Dazai.”

Dazai fell back into the chair, bandaged limbs spilling over the sides carelessly. “I’m not sure anyone is this school is much good for company. Say, what time is it?”

He raised a brow, but kept his expression mostly blank otherwise. Dazai thought he saw a hint of humor there and counted it as a win. “Six-thirty. Breakfast starts in about half-an-hour.” Blaise frowned. “You went off to bed early last night. Some of the others thought you might’ve been sick.”

Dazai waved the concern off with a loose limb. He didn’t care to explain that he’d spent most of his life completely isolated and that all the people made him antsy, so he didn’t. Instead, he titled a bit closer to the fireplace. “Maybe. Hey, shouldn’t you be trying to bully me or something?”

“Why, because you’re a muggleborn?” Blaise scoffed and, after a moment’s hesitation, took a seat near Dazai, “Most of our housemates take great pride in their blood purity—I'm not one of them. I’d advise against letting anyone know you aren’t pure, but it seems you’ve already burnt that bridge. Just keep your head down.”

“Are you giving me advice? Blaise is nicer than I thought!”

(Someone who’s loyal, obedient, and imprints quickly—)

“Hey, does that make us friends?”

Blaise startled in his seat, blinking wide-eyed at where Dazai had sprawled out in his own chair. “It’s a word of advice from one Slytherin to another and nothing more.” Still, the boy’s lips pulled up into a haughty smile as he stared into the fire.

“Right.”

Maybe Blaise would make a good subordinate, too. The boy would take a bit of work, obviously, but Dazai could use the challenge. Besides, it would be nice to have someone loyal to him in Slytherin, if only just to have someone nearby to order around.

It wasn’t long after that the other snakes woke and started filing out of their dorms.
He wasn’t blind to the glares some of them sent his way. Being a muggleborn really hurt his standing that much? Dazai watched as the room grew more crowded by the minute with barely concealed distaste in the way his lips pressed together. Blaise shot him a curious look before getting to his feet.

“I’m off to find Pansy.” Almost as an afterthought, Blaise added in a muted voice, “If you want to get to breakfast before it’s too crowded, you should head out now, *friend.”*

Dazai flushed. That was... odd. He shook himself and rose to his feet, staring at Blaise’s departing back with a lost expression. Dazai rolled his shoulders, wondering what it was about his body language that gave away his discomfort.

Well...He’d take Blaise’s advice and go to the Great Hall now for breakfast anyway. He was already looking forward to being in that place when it wasn’t so obnoxiously populated. Even though he wasn’t sure he could stomach much food at the moment, Dazai spotted on the bulletin board on his way out that schedules would be passed out during breakfast. Maybe he’d find a Weasley while he was out! Breakfast wouldn’t be so abhorrent if he had someone like that to bully in the meantime.

Scratching the back of his head, Dazai pushed his way around a throng of students and left the common room. Once he was in the dungeon halls, Dazai felt a shiver run up his spine. It was so annoyingly cold down here! He’d have to start carrying a blanket around with him... but that might look silly, and Dazai *was* trying to gather subordinates. He’d need their respect, even if starting a little gang was just a hobby for him.

When Dazai had trekked up the last of the steps, he was almost relieved to find himself by the entrance hall. Given how little he’d paid attention the night before, Dazai had anticipated

having to wander the school grounds until he stumbled upon the Great Hall. But that didn't seem to be necessary. After all, he recalled the path between the entrance and Great Hall to be relatively straight forward.

All for the better, he supposed, though the idea of getting lost did have some appeal.

It was only a few minutes of walking before he was pushing open one of the large doors to the Great Hall.

"Ah," he hummed, bouncing on his heels with a pleasant smile, "I'm the only one here. Lucky me~"

Just as Dazai was about to take a seat, however, a voice interrupted him. Dazai felt himself turn to stone at the unexpected presence.

"Not quite, my boy. Good morning, Mr. Dazai."

"Morning," Dazai's slim fingers rapped along the tabletop and he glanced to the far door just in time to see Dumbledore walk in, followed closely by a tired-looking McGonagall. He willed a casual smile, even if their arrival made his skin crawl. "Headmaster. Professor."

"An early riser, are you? I'm afraid you'll have to wait for Professor Snape to arrive before you can receive your schedule."

Dazai watched the man settle into his seat near the front of the hall with thinned eyes, suddenly wishing he could have the Great Hall to himself again. The room was wide and empty, but he was already starting to feel caged in. Still, he offered only a disarming, toothy smile in response.

Dumbledore chuckled. "Well, I won't keep you. Enjoy your breakfast."

After that, the headmaster began to serve himself. Once the eyes were off him, Dazai forced himself to relax—they weren't a *threat,* he was just... *overreacting.* Looking to his own table, Dazai was startled to realize a few dishes of breakfast foods had scattered themselves around him. *Magic. Right.* He grabbed a glass of water, pulling it close with a sigh. There were too many options, he thought, and the smell was a bit off-putting, even if it was only the sweet odor of cinnamon oatmeal and the reek of burnt meat.

Instead, Dazai withdrew a textbook from his bag and began reading to the sound of Dumbledore and McGonagall chattering amongst themselves. After a few minutes, students started to arrive one-by-one.

At first, the disturbance barely even registered to him, and when it did he could easily ignore it. However, by the time each seat on Dazai's sides were occupied, he knew ignoring the other students was a lost cause. Dozens of faces Dazai didn't bother to put names to flooded the Great Hall until it was too noisy with conversations and laughter to focus. He snapped his book shut —*Magical Theory*— when Draco sat down directly in front of him across the table.

The blonde stared at him for a moment, wearing a haughty look, before clearing his throat. “I believe we may have gotten off on the wrong foot.”

Dazai shot a sideways glance to Blaise, who met his blank expression with a shrug before flipping through a newspaper left on the table —*Break-in at Gringotts.* An interesting headline, but nothing for Dazai to bother himself with.

“It has come to my attention that the Sorting Hat *must* have placed you amongst us Slytherins for a reason. It did sort you *nearly* as fast as it did me, after all.”

“It sorted me faster than you, actually.”

Draco spoke over Dazai, seeming not to hear the correction at all. “Because of this, I would like to offer a proverbial olive branch to you, Dazai. Clearly, a *mudblood* such as yourself was placed here for a reason. What other reason would a dirty muggle like yourself be put into Slytherin than for me to fix you? As such, I’d like to offer my guidance. You’ll be following me around... maybe doing my homework... and in return I’ll teach you the ways of a *true* wizard.” Malfoy’s smile was sharp and his eyes deceptively kind. The wild, overdramatic gesturing wasn’t making him look as serious as Dazai thought he was hoping for, however. “You can thank me now.”

“You want me to be your subordinate?” Dazai blinked, flustered with the *gracious* offer. Under his breath, Dazai mumbled to himself, “I think you’ve got our roles confused here.”

“Subordinate... yes, I like that word. Look at you, already doing your part in supporting *pure* wizards!”

Subordinate. *Him!* Dazai didn’t *do* subordinate. Where did this Malfoy brat get off?! And here he was prepared to play nice...

Dazai’s blinking expression must have been answer enough, because Malfoy continued with a self-assured nod. “Good! I’d like you to meet Crabbe and Goyle,” the boy gestured to the two lumps of sentient meat at his side, “They—”

“Wait wait wait! Draco, you already have subordinates?!” Dazai shrieked, “That can’t be. There’s no way you did that faster than me.”

Draco preened at the unintentional compliment, running a slender hand over his tie.

He glared down Crabbe and Goyle, expression tight and searching. Only the more Dazai looked, the less he was able to tell the two apart. He made a face of vague comprehension. “Oh, you didn’t. These are just mindless grunts. I feel better now.”

Crabbe and Goyle drew themselves together beside Malfoy, looking decently meat-headed and dull. “Watch your mouth, mudblood!” One of them shouted and at the same time the other intoned, “Back off, mudblood!”

“You two are the same person.”

Draco's mouth twitched into a serious-looking scowl immediately. The boy ground his teeth together with enough force that Dazai thought they might just snap. Dazai prepared himself to be thoroughly berated by getting comfortable enough to zone out and stare at the wall for the next ten minutes.

"Can't you go one day without running your mouth, boy?"

Dazai blinked up into the dull eyes of Professor Snape, forcing himself not to startle in surprise. Before he could reply, the greasy professor handed him a slip of paper.

"I don't want to see any fighting. Am I understood?"

Across the table from him, Draco shuffled in his seat and grumbled, "Yes, sir." Dazai could see in the boy's eyes that the message hadn't quite stuck.

"Yes, sir." Dazai echoed.

Evidently satisfied, Snape turned on his heels and left them. Dazai watched him go with a wary eye.

He resisted shooting a final glare at Malfoy once the professor was gone and was mildly amused to see the other boy forcibly clamp down on his tongue instead of bickering further. Dazai turned his focus onto his timetable.

Charms is first, huh?

Dazai turned to Blaise, seeing the other boy inspecting his schedule in favor of the newspaper. Draco also seemed to be reading his with a bit too much scrutiny. A quick glance at Thug 1 and Thug 2 revealed that they might not even know how to read.

All was well-and-good. Dazai was looking forward to learning something before he wrote this whole Hogwarts experience off as a waste of time. After all, he didn't think Mori would take kindly to him sending a letter " *I don't have magic, I'm coming home"* before he'd even tried something out.

He'd give his fancy new stick a wave, *then* send the letter.

Speaking of fancy new sticks, Dazai thought, feeling around in his book bag. After a moment of searching, his hand bumped up against the sleek, black case sitting in there, unopened. Ollivander had sent it just days before he had to catch the train, but Dazai had been so busy with mafia work that he never got to look at it. Still, he'd tossed it into his bag this morning, unsure if they'd get a chance to do some magic in class.

Draco, Pansy, Blaise, and those other two stood up, and Dazai dropped his hands to his side in anticipation. As all the other students around them also got to their feet, Dazai began to feel a bit out of place. He grabbed the strap of his bookbag and rose as well. Malfoy cleared his throat, beaming oddly.

"Well, Dazai, I best be off to class. Do think about that offer of mine." He tipped his head back, sneering. "Crabbe, Goyle, let's go. See you in class, *subordinate.* "

With that, Draco departed from the Great Hall. Dazai watched him go with two empty eyes and casually imagining all the things he could do to break that boy to his will. He'd start with the fingers, then maybe pull a few teeth—

Blaise manifested beside him with a dull expression on his face. "Subordinate, huh? You're really stepping up in the world."

"I'm not—" Dazai stop-started, feeling his cheeks dust pink, "If anything he's *my* subordinate."

"Does Draco know that?"

"...you're less nice than I thought."

Blaise shrugged. Without warning, he took a step past Dazai and continued out of the Great Hall. "Maybe. Now aren't you coming to class? We'll be late if you keep dawdling."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.

See you next Saturday. : -)

Potions

Chapter Summary

Dazai goes to his first potions lesson. Ron is there, which is fun.

Chapter Notes

note: Snape's potions speech in this chapter is ripped straight from the movie. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Charms,” Dazai whined, dragging his arms behind him as they walked through the winding halls, “is boring. All these classes are *boring!”*

Stepping onto the stairway just moments before it started to rotate, Draco raised a brow and sneered. “You were barely paying attention. Are you sure that isn’t your problem?”

“True,” Blaise added, “It’s only a lecture day for most classes, of course. Though Professor Flitwick promised that tomorrow we could work on casting.”

“Whatever...”

“Don’t *grumble* at me! That’s hardly how a subordinate of mine should act.”

“I will push you off these stairs.”

Draco shot him an unimpressed looking, and Dazai was forced to admit that Grunts One and Two could probably punt him half-way across campus before he even reached out to push the weasel to his death. Still, something about Dazai’s threat must have stuck, because Malfoy rushed up the last few steps and was the first one off once the stairway came to a stop.

Dazai grinned.

“Potions next,” Draco announced, now a full three feet ahead of Dazai and sending the bandaged boy a cautious glare, “We have it with the *Gryffindors.”*

“ I’ve never heard someone put so much disdain into one word before.”

“*Dazai, shut up.”*

“ Oh, there it is again!”

Suddenly, Crabbe and Goyle appeared on each of Dazai's sides, two towering masses of pure brawn. The part of his brain that was constantly screaming *get out, shut up, it's dangerous!* started screaming just a little bit louder. But Dazai was feeling well-rested today, so he shut those thoughts down and replaced them with apathy.

"Malfoy, keep your dogs in line." Dazai said, beaming with a particular sharpness to the corners of his eyes.

Though he was fairly sure the comment was meant to be silent, Dazai distinctly heard Blaise mumble, "*Aren't you one of those dogs?"* Which— *rude.*

Beside him, Pansy glared holes into Dazai's skull.

Draco assessed him with a clean look, before offering another one of his nasty smirks. After a moment, he waved his thugs off. "I'm trying to be nice, you know. I'm even letting you hang out with us for the day. You should show some gratitude, Mudblood."

Something about that smile irked Dazai. He had a smile like a less intelligent Mori, which was too annoying of a concept to consider for long. Any time spent thinking about that bastard doctor was wasted time, so Dazai let himself tune into a different, less sadistic aspect of Malfoy.

Dazai offered a kind, if dishonest, smile, "Well, I guess Draco's not such bad company! People seem to respect you."

Respect, Dazai had learned, meant that people stayed away from you. Draco drew attention when he wanted it, and chased it away when he didn't. At first, Dazai had only planned to stick with this punk until he got bored with teasing him, but now... Dazai appreciated having some wiggle room in the otherwise crowded hallways. It was doing wonders for his mood. Or maybe it wasn't respect—maybe it was how Crabbe and Goyle glared at anyone who came within two feet of them.

I need subordinates of my own already.

He'd have to hunt down those Weasleys during lunch and see if they would follow him around like a pack of stupid dogs. Then he wouldn't have to listen to Malfoy tell him how to act like a "pure wizard" unless he had a particular longing to bleed from the ears (not that he didn't mind the tips. Dazai always did love putting on airs).

"Yes, well..." Draco hummed, sounding very assured suddenly, "We're here in the dungeons."

They were, Dazai noted with a shiver. He followed lazily into the classroom. The room was large and cold, he noticed immediately. Instead of desks, the classroom was filled with small worktables that would probably fit only two or three people each. A few others were already there, though mostly Dazai couldn't recognize them beyond the vague sense of seeing them during the sorting. He looked through the other students, trying to see if—Oh!

“I’m sitting over there.” Dazai said suddenly, interrupting something Malfoy was saying, “Bye!”

“Wha—come back here!”

Dazai waved Draco’s objection off, feeling a small swell of humor at the idea of leaving his “*boss”* in the dust. He rounded the corner of one workstation and came to a stop, grinning.

“Ron! My dear friend, whom I haven’t seen since yesterday, I found you!”

“Wh— *Dazai?!”* The red-head startled, flailing back in his seat. He ran a hand through his hair and took a calming breath. Dazai was very good at predicting how people would react, but when Ron’s expression hardened and his voice became steel, even he was a bit caught off guard. “Get out here, *snake.”*

Dazai blinked owlishly, then took a seat anyway.

“You tricked me into sitting with you on the train, but now that you’re Slytherin, I want nothing to do with you! Go sit with your new Death Eater friends!”

He... *may* have underestimated the strength of these house loyalties after all.

Huh.

“Don’t be like that!” Dazai whined, kicking his feet, “Besides, I don’t want to sit by that pompous Draco kid. Did you know he wants me to be his subordinate? The nerve!”

Ron gave only a blank glare in return.

“How about this—”

“Take your seats!”

Dazai’s mouth clamped shut as Professor Snape traipsed into the room with an aura that undoubtedly commanded respect. Immediately, any student standing fell to the nearest seat—and Ron was no exception. Snape’s appearance had locked them in as seat buddies. Curious, Dazai glanced to the other side of the room (was every Slytherin sitting on that side?) to see where Draco, Blaise, and Pansy had ended up. They were all seated very near to one another and shooting wide-eyed stares his way.

Dazai gave them a thumbs up.

Professor Snape came to a halt at the front of the class, his eyes rolling over each student with vague disdain. Dazai noticed a few Gryffindors flinch under the harsh glare sent their way with a bit of humor. When Snape got to Dazai’s spot next to Ron, something like confusion flitted across his expression. It was quickly stamped out, but Dazai caught it. Was it really so odd, cross-house friendships? Well, maybe not friendship.

“Put your wands away. There is little foolish wand-waving here.” Snape declared after a second.

Dazai let himself melt into the table, already bored. There was no *foolish wand-waving* in any of these classes. He still hadn't even had to chance to pull his wand from its box because it'd been one syllabus after the next all day. Snape continued talking and Dazai let himself focus only on the echo of the professor's words around the dungeons.

"Many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through the human veins, bewitching the minds, ensnaring the senses... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, and even stopper death—if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach."

Dazai rolled his eyes, slumping forward momentarily. Just another boring class, huh? Although, *stopper death* was giving him some ideas...

Snape cut off abruptly. "What."

Dazai waved his raised hand in an eager hello. "There's a death potion, right? Can we brew that? Is it painless to drink?"

A few chitters rang out form the Slytherin side of the room, but otherwise, the classroom was silent. At his side, Ron tensed up horribly stiff and scooted his chair an inch away. What were they so scared for? Sure, the professors here put Dazai on edge, but he'd spent an entire shopping trip with Snape and he was pretty sure that guy was harmless.

"We will *not* be brewing any potion of the sort." Snape growled. He walked forward until he was directly in front of Dazai desk. The teacher's eyes were searching, livid little things. Under the harsh gaze, Dazai picked at the fraying edges of his bandages. "Now unless anyone else has any idiotic questions, I'd like to move forward with *my* class now."

The room was dead silent.

"As I thought. Now then..."

Professor Snape's lecture blurred together, and Dazai felt himself absorbing information more than participating with it. He had a sharp mind. Usually just hearing something once was enough for the information to stick with him. And while he had been looking forward to learning more about this mysterious wizarding community, the application was a bit...

Well, he didn't want to learn all this *kid* stuff. Dazai wanted to know more—who are the major players in this war? What are the most dangerous spells and creatures? But did he need to know that a bezoar can cure poison? Probably not, since Dazai really only saw himself as intentionally poisoning people.

This was boring and he was going to tell Mori as much in his first letter next week. Let that doctor know he was going to quit Hogwarts and drown himself in the lake.

After the rest of the class passed (filled only with boring instruction), Dazai got to his feet and stretched. Ron, who'd been relatively silent the entire class, jumped to his feet and immediately started off towards the door.

“Hey, Ron, wait up.”

The Weasley ducked his head and continued walking off faster. Dazai didn’t hesitate to hurry off after him. On his way out, he caught the eye of Professor Snape, who wore a strained look at the interaction. Skipping the last few steps out the door, Dazai reached out for the sleeve of Ron’s robes.

“Don’t follow me, mate. I’m not associating with a Slytherin, so leave me alone!”

Dazai pouted but withdrew his hands to his sides anyway. “Aww, but we got along so well on the train! And you found all my books for me, too.”

Ron scowled.

That’s fine—Dazai had been thinking about this all through class, and he’d decided that he still liked the idea of training Ron as a subordinate. The kid had potential! Or something... Maybe he just didn’t like the idea of letting Ron go so easily.

Dazai put on a pleasant expression, hoping to disarm Ron’s distrust of him. “It’d be a shame to not stay friends... and, well...”

“What?” The boy countered, suspicious.

Dazai almost smirked, but covered it up with a coy, ducked expression. “Well, a muggleborn like myself in Slytherin... It’s a bit...”

“They’re picking on you?” Ron asked. Was that a hint of concern in there? “Take it up with Professor Snape!”

“Didn’t you see the way Professor Snape looked at me? He hates me!” Dazai whined, giving a small, fragile-looking smile. “Ah, you saw how quickly the Sorting Hat sorted me right?”

“Too fast, I think.” Ron replied with a barely concealed anger, although Dazai noted he had softened a bit.

“Yes, yes. I agree. It couldn’t possibly have made a proper judgment like that.”

“...so you *aren’t* a Slytherin?”

Dazai clapped his hands together and gave a toothy beam. “Exactly! I’m a Gryffindor at heart, just like you!”

Ron squinted down at him as if putting together a puzzle with his eyes closed and hands tied behind his back. “Aren’t you just trying to trick me? What do you *want?”*

“ Take me under your kind, Gryffindor wings, Ron! Teach me how to be a good Gryffindor. Won’t your housemates be pleased that you’ve converted me?”

Won’t they be pleased to find I’ve spread my influence into not one, but two *houses?*

“ No way! I’m not hanging out with a Slytherin, even if you’re meant to be a Gryffindor! I’ll get laughed out of my own house!”

Dazai waved him off. “I’m sure there’s something in this for you somewhere... ah! Maybe I’ll share some Slytherin secrets with you! I’m sure your brothers will love the intel for their pranks.”

“You want to...” Ron struggled, seeming to roll the wording around on his tongue in distaste before echoing, “...be my *subordinate?”*

“Subordinate... Yes, that’s sounds right.” Dazai preened. He quickly recalled what Draco had said to him just that morning, “Look at you, already doing your part to rehabilitate this poor, muggle Slytherin! So kind, so kind...”

“I’ll—no way!”

“Awww, come on! Help a friend out! I’ll even let you see my owl like you wanted to. You can have it if you take good care of me!”

Ron startled and glanced over his shoulder to where the last of the Gryffindors had just disappeared. “You’ll give me your owl if I hang out with you? Are you that desperate for friends?”

“Sure.” Dazai half-answered. Around them, the dungeons were almost completely empty. “It’s time for lunch now, isn’t it?”

The other boy assessed him quizzically, brows pinched together and fingers tense. After a second, he nodded, then started walking. Dazai didn’t hesitate to try and keep pace. “I’ll *think* about it. But don’t get your hopes up!” He shot a glance at where Dazai followed a step behind him, “And don’t follow me!”

“Yes, boss!”

Ron groaned into the air. Dazai let himself slow down until Ron was well out of the dungeons and it was only him left behind.

Easy. People were too easy to manipulate. He estimated maybe a month before the kid caved and came back to Dazai to accept the offer, giving Dazai access to both Slytherin *and* Gryffindor secrets. It wouldn’t be long before he had most of the school under his control. Just in time to drop out of Hogwarts for how terribly dull the classes were. Well, maybe he’d have a bit of fun starting a wizard gang first. Dazai chuckled to himself in the dungeon corridors.

Someone cleared their throat behind him and Dazai whirled around to come face-to-face with Professor Snape.

Chapter End Notes

Dazai, whose only understanding of stable relationships is mafia hierarchy:
manipulation is the most critical part of the friend-making process

thanks for reading! This has been kind of a slow week for writing but I'm working on it lol
thank you for the kind comments!! ily!! See y'all next Saturday! :)

A Series of Important Meetings

Chapter Summary

Dazai somehow has four entire conversations within the span of one chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Mr. Dazai." Snape spoke clearly, despite the growl underneath his words. "We need to have a talk."

Only one day in and he's already in trouble. Figures. Dazai pasted on an empty smile. "Yes, sir?"

Staring down at him with an odd, sharp expression to his face, Snape looked the image of annoyance. The professor stuck his chin out. "I think you'd prefer we discuss this in the privacy of my classroom. Come along."

Dazai shrugged, following Snape back into the classroom whilst mentally going over everything he'd done in class today. "Is this about asking an 'idiotic question,' sir?" He should learn to keep his mouth shut, honestly. Even back home when he's beaten and bloody, there's a voice in the back of Dazai's head that *begs* to instigate further. He's usually good at shutting up and following orders, but he hadn't pegged anyone in potions as a threat enough for such precautions.

Professor Snape spun on his heels until he was facing his student once again. He took in a deep breath as if preparing to say something horribly taxing.

"How is your arm?"

"What?" The startled interjection was out of his mouth before Dazai even registered it.

"Your arm, boy. The one you so foolishly decided to cut into at Diagon Alley."

Dazai felt his hand unconsciously move to rub at where the cut had been. With how long the Hogwarts' robes were, even the edges of his bandages were barely visible. "Fine." He replied almost hesitantly, "Dr. Mori took care of it." *Well, Mori knew about it at least.*

Snape's eyes thinned, thought Dazai wasn't sure what that particular expression was supposed to mean. "I'll be the judge of that. Give it here." When Dazai didn't make to hand his arm over, Snape's thin lips grew taught. "Perhaps my previous attempts at healing that injury failed, but that doesn't mean I trust muggle methods for healing. Especially..." Snape's

eyes rolled over those bandages again like he was seeing something *more*. He cleared his throat. “See Madam Pomfrey for it at the very least.”

“Who?”

“The Hogwarts matron.”

Sighing, Dazai let his posture deflate a bit. “Ah, there’s no use in arguing, right?”

In return, Snape gave a glare that very clearly spelled out this order was not up for debate. Dazai’s gaze wandered under the pressure before eventually landing on Snape’s stock of potion ingredients by the far-wall. Some of those were bound to be poisonous, right? Maybe something to stop his heart or melt his brain—

“Further,” Snape continued. He waited a few seconds until Dazai’s eyes were back on him. “Your outburst in class today is unacceptable.”

It was about that, I was right. With a smirk, Dazai deadpanned, “I’m not even allowed to ask questions in class, huh.”

“*Questions* are permitted,” Snape ground out, “ideations of *murder* are not.”

Murder? Dazai supposed a potion that could kill his enemies would be helpful—he wondered if it was traceable through modern forensic technology. It was an interesting idea, but Dazai waved off the concern with a bandaged hand. “I was just curious. Anyway, if we aren’t going to brew it, then that’s that.”

Actually, he’d been thinking about a new suicide method via instant death potion, but Dazai wasn’t sure how he felt about Snape having that information on him. It wasn’t like he expected the professor to be concerned or anything, but something about the way Snape watched him now gave him pause. Dazai held his tongue on the matter of self-poisoning and pursued less honest endeavors such as: running away.

“Is that all, sir?”

Dazai watched as Snape’s face did some quick, unexplainable gymnastics. Finally, he let out a burdened sigh layered with more background anger than Dazai thought strictly necessary. “Yes. Go see the matron now, I expect you’ll have plenty of time before lunch.”

As if I’m going to do that!

“ Right away, sir.”

“And Mr. Dazai.”

The bandaged student blinked.

“...If your housemates are giving you trouble, I expect you to come to me for help. Understand?”

Ah... had Professor Snape heard that nonsense he'd told Ron? Oops.

Dazai waited a moment longer, declining to answer. Seeming to sigh, Snape to nodded, giving Dazai leave to scurry out of the empty potions classroom. He felt a bit like a rat at that moment but didn't think Snape was nearly clever enough to be the cat chasing him down. Still, the professor pulling him aside like that couldn't mean anything but trouble in the long-run.

Exiting the dungeons, Dazai decided to wander the halls. It'd been long enough that he wasn't sure where Draco (and co.) had run off to, and he'd assured Ron he'd give the boy some time to think. He didn't know where anyone was, but there were still thirty minutes left until he had to report in for lunch. Unfortunately, all Dazai had learned about navigating Hogwarts since that morning was that he should stick with a group of people who knew where to go.

There was probably a library around here somewhere, right? Maybe he should try and find it.

He was lost.

There was absolutely no sense to these damn halls! You take one staircase only to turn around and find a different one in its place. Dazai was *positive* one staircase had taken him to three entirely separate buildings at one point. He still wasn't entirely sure how that one worked. Then a staircase had started moving the exact second Dazai's foot left the ground and he almost fell off the blasted thing! It was when the numbering on the doors went from 100s to 500s in the span on one right-turn that Dazai decided to call it quits.

"I'll just die here." He whined to an empty corridor. Slumping into himself, he sighed. "It's not the death I imagined, but perhaps the death I deserve. Starving in this labyrinthine hellscape... just kill me already." He took a final step before deciding to just lay down and wait for death. "At least I won't have to see Mori's smug face anymore. Or..."

"Well, well, well! Look what we have here!"

Dazai startled to attention, shooting up from the floor and quickly searching for whoever had snuck up on him. Immediately, Dazai's eyes latched onto a shallow, transparent figure floating near the ceilings. He had black hair, black eyes, and a look positively *dripping* with mischief. The ghost was wearing a jester's outfit. Dazai would love to humor the chaos there if it wasn't directed at him.

"Ittie bittie snakie got lost? Guess beneath all that prim and proper and purity you're all just as incompetent as the rest of these fools!"

"Another ghost." Dazai murmured, mostly for himself. "That's horrifying. Please don't tell me that *everyone* who dies here has to keep living as a ghost."

What a horrible place, if that's the case. Dazai will drop out right now and look at *other* places of education. Ones where he can also pursue his interest in novel suicide methods without the threat of having to stick around after.

"Ah! It's that snot-nosed Slytherin Baron was going on about!" The poltergeist cackled, "I see what he was talking about! You are a weird little brat aren't you?"

The Bloody Baron was gossiping about him? He'd have to do something about that. In the meantime, however...

"It's that strange energy or whatever that Baron guy was talking about, right? He never did get around to explaining." Dazai commented, listlessly prying for information. One last interrogation before the winding, endless hallways decided to walk him straight to his death. He was almost feeling nostalgic.

Of course, expressing curiosity turned out to be a mistake when the jester-like ghost guffawed. "Wouldn't you like to know, baby snake! Isn't that cute, the lil' snakie wants to know something!"

Dazai huffed. This ghost was *beyond* annoying in a way that went beyond the Bloody Baron phasing through the wall mid-conversation. When the spirit started miming something lewd over his head, Dazai resolved himself: he was going to kill the ghost. Somehow. Probably torture him for information first. Dazai had definitely dealt with worse and more annoying people before, but he'd never been strictly *allowed* to torture then kill them. Not *all* of them, at least.

Naturally, then, he should kill the ghost.

... *Can* you kill a ghost?

One way to find out, Dazai thought. Without warning, he reached out to grab at the ghost's foot as the thing swooped overhead. He wasn't sure what he expected to happen—maybe to catch a leg, or to pass right through—but it wasn't *this*.

The ghost *shrieked,* backpedaling (somehow, midair) as far from Dazai as he could get. The mafioso stared after him blankly, spreading out his fingers in the air where he hadn't even been close to the spirit.

Dazai blinked, and the spirit vanished through a wall.

"What was *that?"*

Yeah, what was *that?* He spun on his heels to face the voice—Hermione—with a grin, then a shrug. "I'm starting to sense a trend," Dazai groaned, "If one ghost could just answer my question before floating through a wall then I'll gladly die in peace."

Hermione blinked in such a way that Dazai assumed was enthusiastic agreement.

"Well, I'll happily die either way, but I really don't like being left hanging like that... and I'd hate to come back as a ghost with *that* as my unfinished business. Say, Hermione, when I die

will you help guide my ghostly soul into eternal slumber?"

"...What?"

That, too, Dazai was choosing to read as agreement. At the blank (supportive!) look the girl wore, Dazai quickly pivoted topics.

"So what brings you down here, anyway?" *Wherever here is,* he didn't add (but thought hard enough that if telepathy *were* real, someone definitely got the message), "Should you be talking with a no-good snake like me?"

Hermione seemed to puff up at the accusation. "I, for one, don't believe in all that house segregation nonsense." She smiled like the words were some grand overture.

"How gracious!"

"Besides, we spoke on the train, didn't we? Slytherin or no, I think you may be nicer than most of these other students! If you don't mind my saying."

Dazai? *Nice?* That was almost funny! Still, he could read the hidden words on the girl's lips well enough to leave Hermione's poor character assessment alone for now. "Gryffindor not treating you well?" He hazarded.

"Oh, you're right!" She cried, "Neville will talk with me, sure. But to everyone else, they treat me like some sort of—"

"Know-it-all?"

"—freak!" Hermione finished. She looked ready to continue before Dazai's interjection seemed to register. "Hold on—*Know-it-all?!"*

*"*As it happens," Dazai continued seamlessly, "I don't think I'm getting on well in Slytherin, either." At Hermione's worried glance, he added, "Something about blood purity. I can't listen to a word out of Draco's mouth without falling asleep, but he made it *look* important with all the hand gestures and threatening body guards and powerplays."

Something about what he'd said must have been startling, because Hermione's hands flew to her mouth. "They *didn't!* Oh, you should have been Gryffindor! They may be bullies, but at least they aren't pure blood supremacists! *"*

" I'm sure they're not..." Well, *they were,* but Dazai was in the particular position that he found their supremacy nonsense vaguely amusing and *very* fun to mess with. "Ah, it doesn't matter. You should talk to Ron about me being Gryffindor, though. He definitely agrees, but he's being difficult."

Again, Hermione only wore a look that was vaguely confused. Dazai let it slide, because he already had his claws in Gryffindor (read: Ron) and having two moles wasn't strictly necessary. Could be fun though. A good head-start on Malfoy, too, who didn't have *any* Gryffindor supporters and probably never would.

Annoying prick.

Whatever. He was starting to think he might *actually* have a prayer of escaping these damned halls and that was just-a-bit more important at the moment. Dazai offered what was probably a pleasant look and not a deeply exhausted one. “You wouldn’t happen to know where the library is, would you?”

The word *library* seemed to jumpstart Hermione. Dazai briefly enjoyed how easy the girl was to move from topic-to-topic. She seemed flighty in an intelligent sort of way, if that was possible. Or maybe she was just a people-pleaser—Dazai understood the feeling in his own misguided sort of way.

“I just came from there, actually! It’s just down the hall.”’

You mean there’s reason *to how these halls are organized?!*

“I can show you there if you’d like.”

And you can understand it?!

Dazai opened his mouth to say something much more collected, like, “Please do,” or “Along the way, are there any good spots for hanging oneself?” but never got the chance.

The bushy-haired girl interrupted his intentions with a frown. “But there’s not really the time for that now. It’s lunch time—actually we’re a bit late. Don’t tell me you’ve been looking for the library this whole time?”

Dazai was very, *very* good at lying. “...do you know the way to the Great Hall?” But what was the point?

Hermione snorted. Dazai followed.

He felt a bit like a dog in that moment.

(That meant they were friends, right?)

“You’re late.” Draco commented idly, looking Dazai up-and-down. “Don’t tell me you were planning to spend your lunch with that Weasley.”

“Hardly. I think he hates me.”

“You’re the one who ran off to sit with him during potions.”

Pansy nodded, looking confident. “What was that all about? Sitting with a blood traitor of all people!”

“And asking such a stupid question! Do you want to lose us house points!?”

Dazai shrugged, feeling lazy from all the boring classes. “Information gathering.”

“About poisons.” Blaise deadpanned.

“Among other things. Ah, no thank you.”

Blaise slid the ham-and-cheese sandwich in front of Dazai regardless of the refusal. His expression took on a curious frown. “Alright.” Blaise’s eyes seemed to analyze Dazai, but he didn’t push.

Dazai shrugged the other boy off, not particularly caring. He let the gifted sandwich go ignored, instead smiling hollowly towards Draco. The boy wasn’t his *boss,* but it didn’t hurt to pretend he was for now. “And I spent my lunch wandering the halls. Draco left me behind, so I got lost.”

“Only because you chose that Weasley over us!” Malfoy ground out. As if to emphasize this point, he stabbed a fork into a grape.

“Information gathering.” Dazai repeated, clicking his tongue, “It’s like you don’t listen to a thing I say, Boss.” When Draco perked up at the title, Dazai added, “I’d already laid some groundwork over in Gryffindor back on the train. I wanted to see if anything had paid off.”

Five pairs of eyes blinked back at him, dumbfounded. It wasn’t until Blaise whistled lowly that the others seemed to snap back to attention. Draco spoke first, ever the leader:

“Maybe you do have some Slytherin in you after all, Dazai!”

“*Cunning*, sure*,* ” Pansy chimed in, “but still a dirty muggleborn...”

Blaise nodded, looking more amused than impressed, but impressed nonetheless.

Almost eagerly, Draco asked. “Well? Does he trust you?”

“Give it a couple of weeks.” Dazai replied simply. Gosh, these brats were just too much fun to mess with. “Until then, you’ve got me all to yourselves. Aren’t you lucky!"

Chapter End Notes

"mr. dazai" has strange energy to it but i'm committed to it at this point
also the ghost is peeves I don't think I specify that in this chapter but like??? we'll get there

thanks for reading!!
and thanks for commenting!! it means a lot!!!!

see yall next Saturday! and maybe Wednesday I haven't decided yet lol

Match to Needle

Chapter Summary

Dazai finally gets to try a spell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"It's a match to a needle." Draco repeated, slowly.

The way the boy carefully enunciated each word like Dazai was a small child was horribly condescending. He wanted to stab the brat. Preferably soon. But Dazai was working on something called *self-restraint.* Ghosts, apparently, *screamed* when he tried to touch them. He was oozing so much malice that creatures that were already *dead* were afraid of being dead again (again but *worse*, because it was by Dazai's hands). So he was practicing restraint.

Dazai smiled. Draco smiled. Neither of these was a pleasant smile, but calling it *malicious* would only invite danger, so *pleasant* was still the working term. *Happy* was a bit of a stretch.

"Match to needle." Dazai mimed, smiling *pleasantly, "* Got it."

Draco smiled back, also *pleasantly,* and said, "You haven't even taken out your wand yet. Are you *sure* ?"

He was practicing self-restraint because people are of no use to you if they run away faster than you can catch them.

"I don't know, Malfoy." Dazai replied in a voice that probably classified as cheerful somewhere on this miserable planet. Beside him, Pansy shivered for entirely unrelated reasons. " *Am I?"*

He didn't wait for a response and pointedly ignored Draco when the boy attempted to give one *("Maybe Professor McGonagall will do a special instruction just for you if you ask really nicely, Dazai.").* Instead, Dazai pulled the sleek black box from his bookbag. His wand—he still hadn't seen it yet. Over his shoulder, Dazai heard Blaise make an appreciative sound.

"Classy." He commented. "What's it made of?"

"Not a clue. Wood, probably." Dazai hummed, taking off the top. "Blood, definitely."

“What?”

“Anyway,” he withdrew the wand from its box and held it up in the light. Just like the box that contained it, Dazai’s wand was long, slim, and dark. At the tip, it was sharper than the other wands Dazai saw around him—probably good for stabbing someone if needs be. He knocked it against the table once, humming curiously when it made the sound of a thin, hollow wood. He appreciated the polish for a moment longer before turning his attention back to the Malfoy. “...What was that spell again, Boss?”

“What kind of wood is that? Blackthorn?” Draco asked instead.

“Pine. Oak.” Dazai listed aimlessly, “Cherry. Cedar. I thought all woods were the same.”

“ *Mine’s* hawthorne. It’s *very* hard to master, so I can see why you wouldn’t have it.” Draco buzzed with all the annoying energy of a mosquito while he flaunted his wand for everyone to see. Crabbe and Goyle made *Oooh’* s and *Aaah’* s at all the right places. Dazai smiled *pleasantly,* and Draco beamed right back.

Dazai didn’t roll his eyes because he was practicing self-restraint, but he did smile just a little bit wider. “Since it’s hard to master, won’t you have to work twice as hard as everyone else? I’ll take my pine-oak-cherry-cedar wand, thanks.”

“It can’t be made of all of those, Dazai.” Blaise hummed noncommittally.

Someone cleared their throat, and Draco’s little gang paused to look up. Professor McGonagall was glaring down at them with obvious annoyance. Her nose scrunched up and Dazai imagined a cat trying not to sneeze. “Match to needle, students.” She said (possibly loud enough for the whole class, but *certainly* loud enough for six bickering Slytherins). “I’ll want to each and every student at least make one solid attempt before class is over or I’ll start deducting points.”

Dazai nodded, glancing down at the matchstick sitting completely untouched on his desk. “You’ll have to excuse me, Boss, but for the rest of class me and my pine-oak-cherry-cedar wand are going to be doing the bare minimum to turn this match into a needle.”

“It’s clearly just blackthorn.”

They’d taken notes on how to transfigure just this one thing all hour—well, the last thirty minutes. It was *boring* and Dazai spent the whole class wondering if he could transfigure himself into a corpse, but he was *there* and he had *sort of* listened. Anyway, McGonagall had told them to practice changing the matchstick with an air of *I expect you to fail but we still have fifteen minutes left and dammit I’m going to use them!*

Well, he’d wanted to do something more practical anyway.

Assuming he had magic. Which Dazai was still fairly certain was a lie Mori had concocted. But...

Eh.

He held the wand out and gave it a little spin.

The match was not amused. Neither was Dazai.

“Well, I tried.”

Blaise looked up from his own matchstick, brows raised. “You didn’t do anything.” He gave his wand a *swish,* and though the matchstick didn’t outright change, it *did* roll on the desk.

“...you blew on it.”

“Shut up.” Blaise countered, trying again studiously to no obvious results, “I thought you wanted to do some real magic. You’ve been whining about it all day, but now you won’t even try.”

He shrugged. “She obviously expects us to fail. I’m pacing myself.”

As if to prove a point, Dazai flicked his wand at the matchstick again.

...Nothing.

Looking around, Dazai saw mostly the same results: frustrated brats waving sticks at their desks. Was he entirely certain this wasn’t a prank by Mori to get him to look stupid waving a stick around and pretending he had magic? Maybe. But...

He could feel *something.* Every time Blaise tried again, Dazai could *feel* it. Like the air around his wand had grown dense—just for a second—with something. So, yes, something was happening but it wasn’t enough to do the spell. To his side, that *something* (magic?) seemed to burn bright suddenly before flickering out and dying.

“I did it!” Draco cheered.

Blinking, Dazai leaned over to see just what Draco had done. The matchstick was... still a matchstick. But that wasn’t quite right. No—it was a matchstick that was just a l*ittle* bit pointy at the end. While Draco showed off his semi-pointy match around with way more pride than his spell deserved, Dazai mused.

So that was what a successful spell felt like? Well, mostly successful. He tried to focus on what that had felt like—how the air around Draco had seemed to buzz, to *burn.* Like he was tearing something out of the air and *forcing it into the match.* Dazai could feel it like he could feel any ability, be it Mori’s or Hirotsu’s or anybody else’s for that matter. But it did feel different. In an odd sort of way Dazai couldn’t quite place.

Which was all sorts of annoying, because Dazai didn’t really *do* abilities. He kind of *undid* abilities, actually. And while he couldn’t exactly place his finger on just what this “magic” was, it was definitely ability adjacent. Which meant he *would* nullify it (if Snape failing to heal him hadn’t made that obvious enough). It also meant he wouldn’t be able to do magic.

Which meant Mori was an idiot—Dazai already knew that—and that the old doctor had something else in mind, sending him here. Kind of a given, really, but this was all new levels

of obnoxious, really.

“Congratulations, Mr. Malfoy,” Professor McGonagall hummed after analyzing the partially-transfigured needle. “Five points to Slytherin for the impressive display. Though I’ll remind you a *complete* transfiguration will be necessary for our practical exams.”

Figures. Guess he’ll just fail all of his classes.

Once the professor had wandered off to help another student, Dazai gave his wand another experimental flick.

None of the magic in the air drew together for him, and it *certainly* didn’t do what he was asking it to. It was just buzzing around him like before—kind of giving him a headache, actually, with how the *air itself* was activating No Longer Human constantly. It was a hunch before, but now he was near certain.

“Blaaaaaise! I’m bored.”

“Practice your spell, Dazai.”

He whined, eyeing the match lazily. Maybe it would look better if he just seemed lazy—and not totally incapable of doing magic. Why on *Earth* he was even accepted into this school, Dazai couldn’t fathom. To please Blaise, he drew stars in the air with his wand.

Draco spun to face him, expression amused in an *I’m-better-than-you* sort of way. “Can’t figure it out?” He hummed. “As your boss, I *suppose* I could lend a helping hand. Consider it your first lesson in being a good wizard!”

“What’s that, then?”

“How to take instruction from your betters.” Draco surmised with another *pleasant* smile, “As a pure-blood, I’ll *always* be your better.”

Gee, thanks. Still, Dazai sat up straight and made a gesture for Draco to continue. Even if he couldn’t *use* the spell, it didn’t hurt to figure out what was actually happening—just how he was manipulating the magic.

“You’ll remember from our notes—Oh, you were taking notes, weren’t you? I know it can be challenging for someone such as yourself—”

Aaaaand Dazai stopped listening.

He should probably work on that, but Draco really never shut up. Dazai’s had a lot of practice pretending to listen to Mori when the doctor is patching him up after training to just pick up the most important details. He’s well versed in knowing all the right times to nod along, too.

Speaking of—Dazai nodded and made a small noise of comprehension. What in the world Draco going on about, Dazai had no idea. But the blonde barreled on, looking proud anyway, so it was probably something benign. Whatever. *Ooh!* That student’s matchstick was looking *very sharp* —it'd probably be sharp enough to stick in his throat—

“Do you understand?”

Dazai nodded. What was he agreeing to?

Holding his wand out, Draco gave his wrist a *flick,* and Dazai *felt.*

The air grew thick—no, something *in* the air grew together. Draco’s wand drew the magic to it with a wave, then pushed it out with the flick. It felt like—like he’d *given the magic purpose.* Which is a weird thing for Dazai to be able to tell, but he could. In the air... yes, he could feel it like he’d been familiar with the language of magic all his life. And perhaps he was. After all, hadn’t No Longer Human always been a quiet buzz in the back of his head?

Magic was *everywhere.* It was very potent here, but it was everywhere. He hadn’t really noticed. Or—he'd noticed, but he hadn’t realized No Longer Human was actually doing something, and not just constantly active by default.

Draco cleared his throat and Dazai forced himself to concentrate on the *now.* This *was* interesting! Learning to read the magic in the air—that could be a useful skill, right? Dazai opened his mouth, ready to ask for another demonstration, even if that meant humbling himself to Draco a little bit more.

“Wands down!”

Of course.

“That will be all for today, class.” McGonagall continued, “Your first transfiguration lesson is always quite difficult. After all, you’ve likely never attempted something as complex as changing one thing into another before. Still, I’m impressed with the work most of you have done today. By next class, I expect all of you to have memorized the tables we discussed in class today. You have an essay due by Friday—the details are on the board. Do not forget it. Dismissed.”

Dazai stood and followed his group out of the classroom with only a parting glance at his desk. The matchstick sitting there was completely untouched by magic. He wondered if Professor McGonagall would notice that literally nothing had happened to it. Nothing *would* happen to it. Still, it was a hard lesson. He’d have a few days before anyone began to suspect he was incapable of magic.

“Dazai,” Blaise sighed when he finally caught up, “You weren’t even trying.”

“I tried!”

“You were just drawing shapes in the air.”

“...You noticed that?”

That earned him a decently exasperated glare.

“Because he didn’t listen to me.” Draco interrupted, swirling his hand in the air like he was conducting everyone’s attention. “I’m sure even a muggleborn like yourself could figure it

out if you just paid attention to my form."

Dazai nearly rolled his eyes, but forced himself to smile instead. "Thanks for demonstrating! But I'm not sure it'll help much."

Draco sighed like he was making some big concession. "You're right. You *are* sort of hopeless as a student. But with my guidance, I'm sure you'll manage *something.* "

Dazai smiled *pleasantly.* And while *happy* was still a bit of a stretch, watching Draco flinch away was the tiniest bit enjoyable.

Chapter End Notes

He'll figure it out eventually I promise! : 0

ok so I'm??? taking some liberties with how magic works. The gist of it is that there's like? latent magic in the air and wands allow wizards to manipulate it. When No Longer Human activates he can feel abilities/magic, so basically he can tell exactly how wizards are manipulating the magic, which isn't something most wizards are actually aware of. Anyway Dazai figures this out eventually in a bit more detail but since updates are so spread out I wanted to make sure we were all on the same page now.

thank you for reading! and for commenting!! ily!!
Next update on Saturday as per usual

Pansy

Chapter Summary

Pansy is very protective of Slytherin ideals. Dazai just happens to contradict most of them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I thought for sure he was like... wizard mafia."

Blaise shot him a raised-brow over the chess table. He moved his rook with a sigh. "Who are you talking about? Don't tell me you mean Draco."

"No, no. Professor Quirrell!"

"...Do I want to know?"

Dazai slunk further into his chair with a put-upon frown, drawing a picture of the turban-wearing professor into his mind. " *Is* there even a wizard mafia? I mean, if anyone here is mafia—which no one is, of course, that'd be silly—but if anyone *was,* it'd be Quirrell, right?"

"How does that make sense?" He asked, "Please take your turn."

With an amused huff, Dazai reached for his knight. "He just seems the type. He's got this air about him like ' *I'd break your legs if I had to.'"*

Are we talking about the same professor? Stuttered through the whole lesson, almost cried when you refused to answer a question?"

"Yeah, that guy." He whined. "All class he talked about his travels—which is boring since none of them involved kidnapping or drug sales or whatever. He *really* seems like a criminal to me. You see it too, right?"

Blaise stared at him. He didn't even seem to register moving a piece on the board until he snapped it down onto the table. "...I don't get you, sometimes."

"Me neither." Over the board, Dazai's hand stilled at the interruption. "I can't believe you're hanging out with *him,* Blaise."

Dazai rolled his neck, staring blankly at Pansy's pout. After a pause, he turned back to the chessboard without doing anything but to rest his head on his arms. "I'm great company,

obviously."

"You're *company."* Blaise corrected. "Anyway, it's almost curfew and you *know* he's going to get lost if I let him wander away now."

Dazai blinked and sat up. "Are you babysitting me?"

"Your turn."

Oh. Dazai turned his focus back to their game.

"*Still,"* Pansy hissed, her volume just shy of being a whisper, "A *mudblood,* Blaise! And you're playing chess with him? Letting him win, even!"

"He's doing the winning himself, actually," Blaise replied, a hint of irritation sneaking into his tone. He cleared his voice of emotion before adding. "And he's *Draco's* pet, not mine."

Finally having settled on a move, Dazai looked back up to meet Blaise's eyes.
"You're *dogsitting* me! ...Is that worse?*"*

Blaise made a so-so gesture with his hand, then squinted down at the chess board with an agitated frown.

"Still," Pansy growled, "I don't like it. Why does he even *want* a new—a new *pet-project* ?"

Blaise didn't respond except to glare down at Dazai's queen. After a few seconds, he grunted and knocked down his own king.

"You forfeit?"

"You were going to win in two moves and you *know it.* I'd rather not waste my time on something that's already lost." He frowned, eyes roving over Dazai as if there was something there to analyze. Blaise didn't speak for a long moment. "You know, I don't think Draco realizes how clever you are."

"Maybe he's just not paying attention."

"Or you're playing the idiot."

Said like an idle observation, not a threat. If anyone at the Port Mafia had said that, it would be a threat. If his father had said that, it would have been a *death sentence.* People are such curious little things like that, always saying one thing and meaning another. Dazai hummed, picking up his triumphant black king and rolling it between two fingers. "Well, maybe that too."

He heard Pansy scoff from the sofa, clearly disagreeing with Blaise's assessment.

Well, you can't win them all, and it was only by virtue that Blaise seemed relatively neutral about most things that they could even have a civil conversation. With Draco... well, it really

was like dogsitting (but he didn't think Draco realized just *who's* neck the collar was being slipped on).

Eyes shining dangerously at Pansy, Dazai allowed himself a chuckle. "I'll win you over eventually, you know. People say I'm very charming—"

"No one has ever said that about you."

Dazai pouted and kicked out his feet under the table. Before he could come up with a suitable comeback, Blaise got to his feet. He stretched, back arching dramatically with a *pop.* He sighed, relaxing again.

"I'm turning in to bed early tonight."

"You trust me not to run away?" Dazai asked, amused.

Blaise fixed the robe on his shoulders with a pointed look to his friend. "Unlike you, I don't have to do everything Draco says. If he wants someone to watch you he should have one of his goons do it instead."

"Ah, Blaise is so irresponsible!"

"Good night."

Dazai stared after Blaise until the door to the boy's bedroom snapped shut. There were still a few Slytherins up, and though Dazai didn't think any of them would want to start a game, he still reset the chess board. Actually, he was pretty sure everyone here basically hated him. Not that Dazai cared—he'd been avoiding everyone else, having immediately deemed them not interesting enough to mess with.

He was rolling the black king on its pointed head when Pansy sat herself down across the table from him.

"You want to play?"

Pansy glared. *H ard. "* Not with *you."*

"I wouldn't want to play a losing game either if I were you. So—" he smirked over the girl's flustered growls, "—what *did* you want, then?"

She stared at him for a second, face scrunched up in a way that made Dazai think she was battling her thoughts over something. "You think you're hot stuff, just because Draco is letting you hang around. You're not."

Dazai almost started laughing— *almost.* Was she trying to threaten him? *Him?!* As if he didn't know twenty different ways to kill her with just the chess piece between his thumb and index finger. Dazai amused himself with the mental image, before giving in to Pansy's glare. "...You're jealous."

“Of *what?”* She sounded just the right amount of disgusted at being likened to Dazai. Which —this time he *did* laugh. “What’s so funny?! I’m not jealous of a *mudblood !”*

“*Sure.”*

Pansy took a white pawn in her fist and slammed it down two paces ahead on the board.

Well, that’s a challenge if he’s ever seen one. Dazai breathed out a mildly amused breath and returned his king to its throne. After a moment’s hesitation, he made his first move on the board. Glancing up at Pansy, who was half-bent over the table in concentration, he mumbled, “We better not be fighting over who gets to spend time with Draco, because I will quite literally throw myself into the fireplace if we are.”

Another piece marched forward on the board and Dazai sighed.

Knights, rooks, bishops—the whole of two armies crawled around that board in silence for nearly five minutes before Pansy finally spoke.

“Muggleborns don’t belong in Slytherin.”

“ So I’ve been told.” *Oh, thank goodness!* They *weren’t* fighting about Draco—they were fighting about this blood nonsense. Which was great, because Dazai had been considering throwing the game if winning meant acknowledging he *liked* Draco. Armed with this new knowledge, Dazai prepared himself to destroy Pansy at chess. He had a streak to keep up, after all.

She glared him down as if she *knew* he hadn’t been taking their game seriously and was deeply insulted by it. “ Muggleborns should stay in those other lousy houses where they belong.” Pansy’s queen charged forward. “But here you are. And Draco and Blaise are just *okay* with that! Like you *aren’t* a plague on our house.”

Being claimed as a subordinate was considered a kind welcome? By Port Mafia standards, he supposed that was merciful, but a *school?* Dazai took a breath—he was honing that self-restraint muscle—and said something significantly less threatening than he’d been thinking. *“* You realize they're just keeping me on a leash, right? Draco seems the type to like keeping pests under control.”

“Damage control? Sure.” Pansy said, mostly to herself it seemed. She moved a knight thoughtlessly, and Dazai captured the exposed queen it left behind. “I still don’t like it. There are *better* ways to deal with *things* like you.”

Dazai shrugged and looked the stolen queen over. The perfect match to its darker companion —his still in play. He’d always liked chess. Shame no one here seemed like a good enough player to go up against. *Children are dull. Mori would have at least put up a fight.*

She watched him for a moment more before letting out a breath. Pansy had been angry when she’d challenged him before, but something about having to sit still and calculate her moves must have been calming. At least she wasn’t growling anymore.

“Prove it.”

He blinked.

“I don’t trust you. I think you snuck into Slytherin because you’re a dirty mudblood who’s *up* to something.” Pansy said lowly. “But Draco wants you around.”

He wants to use me, Dazai thought indignantly but held his tongue, *It isn’t like we’re friends.*

“Prove you’re loyal to Slytherin. Prove you’re loyal to *Draco.”*

He set the white queen down beside her fallen comrades. Dazai frowned down at the chess board—he was winning, obviously. There was an obvious path to victory Pansy wasn’t seeing down there that spelled out her loss in three easy steps. But Dazai was *just playing.* That’s all he’d been doing since arriving at Hogwarts. Hearing Pansy’s blood-red voice spell out her demands, though, the thought occurred to him once again:

These kids take house loyalty way too seriously.

Not unlike the mafia, that.

Dazai wondered what to do with Pansy while he pretended to contemplate his next move in their game. She wasn’t like Blaise, who couldn’t care less what Dazai did. Or like Draco, who was too blinded by his own self-worth to realize Dazai was only a subordinate for as long as he thought it might be fun. Pansy was *cautious.* She thought he was an idiot, sure, but she knew that didn’t stop him from being dangerous to whatever house values she was trying to protect.

He moved a piece forward, chuckling silently. Pansy was maybe the only person here with an adequate amount of fear for him, even if it *was* horribly misplaced. “What did you have in mind?”

For a moment, Pansy didn’t say anything. She glared down at the chess board before her head snapped up. “I’m sure you’ll figure something out.” With a growl, Pansy gripped her king in her fingers then, without warning, tossed it across the board. It smacked against some of Dazai’s pawns and bowled them over. She watched the pieces clatter together before speaking again. “Give me a show of loyalty, *mudblood* . ”

“Or?” Dazai asked, curious.

“You’ll wake up one morning to find that Draco’s not protecting you from Slytherin anymore. You aren’t welcome here. His taking you on as a subordinate was *merciful.* If he can’t *use you* or *fix* you or whatever else he wants to *do* with you, I’ll give the word and make your life here a living hell. *Prove to me your life is worth protecting.* ”

She did not ask if he understood the terms of their agreement. She didn’t really have to. Pansy got to her feet and vanished behind a locked door and Dazai watched her go with an expression empty of emotion. Most of the other Slytherins had gone to sleep already. But the

ones here now—Dazai saw in their faces that Pansy's words weren't far from the truth. They wanted to tear him apart because he was muggleborn.

Against all odds, the realization made him want to laugh. But Dazai was practicing self-restraint, so he reset the board in silence instead.

Dazai dreamt about the paintings and the people living inside them again. He didn't dream about Pansy forcing a *show of loyalty* down his throat. His problem wasn't her—she was the *game* he was playing. Just a part of a game. His problem was that he was *still alive to play it.*

(Dazai's first week at Hogwarts was obnoxiously *boring,* but if Pansy asked, he might just pretend to worry over it.)

Chapter End Notes

anyway everyone is slytherin basically hates dazai bc their parents are all not great people
I'm sure he'll figure something out
also i dont know anything about chess

thanks for reading and commenting! i love hearing about what yall think ^^
see yall next week :)

Dazai Finds the Library

Chapter Summary

> Dazai finds the library. Not on his own, of course. That would require a basic understanding of how to navigate Hogwarts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You and Pansy are..." Blaise trailed off. Finally, he settled on, "Different."

Dazai shrugged him off. "She's extorting me."

"...Okay. Don't have too much fun."

There was a reason he liked Blaise most of all. He seemed to be the only person here with an inkling that Dazai knew what he was doing. Gripping the railing tightly when the stairs began to rotate, Dazai turned an innocent glance towards Blaise. "Hey, what's the best way to prove you're loyal?"

He blinked. "Loyalty is a Hufflepuff thing, isn't it? Why don't you ask one of them."

"Because you're here, and I don't know any Hufflepuffs?"

"Meet one. I'm going back to the dorms—are you coming?"

Dazai thought for a moment. "Not yet."

"I'm not coming to find you when you get lost."

"*If* I get lost."

Blaise quirked a brow.

"Don't give me that— *Oh!* Look, I'll be fine. Hermione will escort me."

At her name, the bright-eyed girl startled to attention from across the hall. Hermione had a book bag slung over one shoulder. Dazai noted, amused, that it was nearly overflowing with textbooks, notebooks, and loose papers. Spotting Dazai in the mostly empty halls, she smiled and moved toward him. But the moment her eyes landed on Blaise, Hermione stopped dead in her tracks.

"Good evening, Dazai." She said with obvious caution.

Dazai snorted at the flat tone. She was worried about *Blaise* of all people? *House loyalties,* he reminded himself, *Slytherins are meant to be scary, I guess.*

" Hey, Blaise, am I scary?"

The other boy didn't even twitch, completely ignoring Dazai's question in favor of taking a step back. Instead, he addressed Hermione, "No need for that." He paused, then added, "Don't let him get lost, please."

"I'm not going to—*and he's gone."*

With Blaise disappeared around the corner, Hermione finally came forward until she was just a step beside Dazai. She gave him a curious look. "Your friend?"

"Something like that. He's dogsit—*Uh*, making sure I don't get lost."

Hermione's brows shot up. Maybe Gryffindors didn't practice the delicate art of subordinate-making and leash-holding? Dazai wondered mutely if the other houses were just as hostile as Slytherin was.

After a moment (spent trying to dissect Dazai's curious slip-up, no doubt), Hermione cleared her throat and smiled gently. "To be honest, I thought it might be longer before we could talk again," Hermione confessed. "Being in different houses and all. But it's only been a week. I'm glad."

Her smile was *warm* and *soft* and not at all the *pleasant* smiles they traded in Slytherin. Dazai, luckily, was well-versed in the art of *all smiles*. This included *warm and soft* smiles, mostly by virtue that he'd practiced them in front of a mirror when he had been younger, and he drew his own version of that smile onto his face for Hermione now.

"It's nice to see you again," Dazai said and— *ugh,* smiling *warm and soft* made his words *warm and soft* too. Being nice was such an unpleasant taste on his tongue. Why anyone was ever *gentle* was an honest mystery to him. It certainly wasn't a muscle the Port Mafia encouraged flexing. Fortunately, Dazai had practiced *saying* warm and soft things in the mirror, too.

Hermione seemed like the type to appreciate his effort, even if she didn't realize how much of an effort it was to pretend to be *warm and soft*.

Anyway, *It's nice to see you again* was just about the extent of gross pleasantries Dazai could handle for one conversation. He felt his smile grow pretend-cheerful around the edges, wiping away all that soft nonsense. "You aren't busy, are you?"

"Not until dinner." She shrugged the overflowing bag higher up on her shoulders. "I was hoping to stop by the library but—" something in her expression softened further, "since it's *you* I'll just do it later."

The perks of being Hermione's only friend were plentiful, Dazai thought, amused, if unnecessary.

“Just my luck! You should show me where the library is since you’re going there.”

“That’s right!” She laughed, “I’m glad you found me *now,* and not before *wandering the halls,* like the other day.”

“Now you’re just bullying me.”

“Ah, no! It’s—it’s this way, Dazai.”

After making sure he was following, Hermione fixed the bag on her shoulder again and started towards the library. While walking, they engaged in light conversation, but Dazai’s mind was mostly elsewhere. *Mostly*, he was thinking about the layout of Hogwarts. The—the moving picture and numbered rooms and statues— *none* of it was helping him remember the path. After the third turning stairwell, Dazai gave up, completely resigning himself to being lost forever.

He blinked wearily to Hermione, who navigated the halls like the made *any sense,* which *they didn’t. “* Say, Hermione...”

She spared him a glance. “Hm?”

“How do you feel about cartography?”

“Map making? I’ve never really thought about it... Although I read the *most interesting* book on magical maps this morning... Ah, why?”

“...No reason.”

...What he wouldn’t give for a sensible map of this school.

Dazai came to a stop. “The library!”

“You found it!” Hermione congratulated, giggling into her sleeve.

The library—*finally.* He skipped inside, feeling pleased at having finally accomplished *something.* And it was worth the search, too. Towering bookshelves full of what must have been *thousands* of books Dazai had never even *heard of* before lined the walls and made rows of an otherwise massive room. Dazai beamed, bouncing on his feet and swinging his arms.

He couldn’t do magic, but he could learn everything about it. And if Dazai knew one thing, it was this: *Information is power.* Since he wouldn't be making in progress with his classes, it *couldn’t hurt* to read up in here, right?

Hermione matched his grin with equal excitement. *A kindred spirit!* Her eyes seemed to cheer.

Not that Dazai cared much for simple things like *sharing hobbies* or *being a bookworm.* He was just pleased to have at least *one* useful subordinate that didn't *also* hate him—something that was proving strangely difficult to find at Hogwarts.

Go figure.

(Just *how* he was supposed to start a gang in these conditions was *baffling* at best. But Mori had said he could do whatever he wanted so long as he was at Hogwarts, and *dammit* Dazai wanted to start a gang!)

Hermione set her things down at one of the tables and pulled out a quill, paper, and a textbook. Dazai eyed them warily before giving a quick word ("*I'm going to look around!"*) and wandering off.

Where to start? This was *exactly* what Dazai had been looking for at the start of all this *magic nonsense* —the documents, information, books, *everything.* But now that it was *here...* should he start with history? The history class here was *dreadfully boring,* but reading about it himself should be more interesting. Not to mention the benefits of understanding *just how* the magic community had gone undetected for so long. Or should he start with something more fundamental, like the basics of magic itself? Figure out *exactly* how they related to abilities. If there was a loophole that could let *him* do magic, Dazai needed to know.

...but maybe there was just *too much* to read. He should just die instead.

He sighed and ran his fingers over the spines of hundreds of worn tomes. There was no rush. After all, he had all year—maybe even all *seven years* —to sort through the Hogwarts library. Plenty of time to read everything that looked interesting. Maybe by then, Mori will have finally told his exactly why he had to *go* to Hogwarts, too, so Dazai could at least do something *useful* with all the information he was about to collect.

One problem at a time.

Now, where to start—

"You're *what?!"*

" Failing my classes. Keep it down—"

"Shh!"

Hermione and Dazai both startled when the library caretaker—Madam Pince—glowered at them from behind her desk. When Hermione spoke next, her voice was barely above a whisper.

"You can't be *failing your classes,* it's only *week two,* Dazai!"

He shrugged, flipping the yellowed page of a borrowed book carelessly. After a few minutes of searching, Dazai settled on history as the first topic he would broach. It was important to

have a background before attempting to dissect anything, and the magical community was no different. “It's inevitable, really. Since there’s no point, I might as well just die—”

“Don’t say that!” She hissed under her breath, an odd shine to her eyes, “You seemed so studious, but you aren’t even going to try to pass your classes?”

Except that no amount of trying *is going to turn No Longer Human off.* The sting of his ability rattling around in his skull was evidence enough of that.

He couldn’t say that, obviously—abilities didn’t really have a *place* in the magic community, he was quickly learning. In fact, all the books he’d read so far seemed *entirely detached* from abilities on the whole. It was curious. Especially since Dazai was fairly certain they both came from very similar powers, considering he could nullify both. For how hidden *magic* was to Dazai, it seemed *abilities* were just as hidden to magic society. That was the next topic he was going to hunt down, actually. There was a history there *for sure.* Now he just had to *find it.*

“ You’re just...” she struggled visibly to find the right words, “I’ve *seen* you sleeping through classes. Can’t you at least *try* to stay awake? I’m sure you’ll feel more confident if you’d actually take notes.”

“Taking notes is for people who can’t just remember stuff.” When Hermione shot him a glare, he added unhelpfully, “or *nerds.”*

When it looked like she might interrupt again, Dazai sighed and snapped his book closed. “And it’s not the *content* I’m failing,” the thick feeling of making an honest confession welled up on his tongue, “It’s the *magic.”*

Hermione's lips curved into a perfect *O. “* Are you sure you’re *saying* the spells right? It’s about *enunciation—”*

“I’m saying them fine.” Dazai hummed (*growled).* And he *was*—if Draco gave him *one more* pointer on how to properly say *Lumos* Dazai’s waning self-restraint would snap in two. He didn’t care how much Draco insisted, he *was* saying it right and anyone who said otherwise could *shove it.*

“Well, it couldn’t *hurt* to stay awake during class, could it?”

“I mean—”

“Dazai! You *have* to do well in your classes! If you fail *now,* you won’t be able to get a good job in the future!”

“Oh, good. I’ll just find a nice bridge to jump off then.”

Without warning, Hermione slapped her quill down on the table, sending a few stray splashes of ink over her homework. That look in her eyes... *anger?* Dazai, thankfully, didn’t flinch back because *that would be stupid* and he’s not *afraid* of her.

“ Don’t *joke* about something like that! It’s—”

“*Shh!”*

Hermione took a breath. “I’m sorry for yelling.” Whether she said that to the librarian or to Dazai was anyone’s guess. “But you shouldn’t joke about... about *suicide,* Dazai. That’s a really serious thing.”

A serious thing... *I’m not supposed to laugh, right?*

The touch of cotton bandages on his skin suddenly felt a bit too tight, like they were trying to smother the fight out of him. Underneath, the scars Dazai refused to look at seemed to burn. Even in a place like this, he’s really nothing like his peers. His greatest desire in the world was taboo to everyone else—Dazai swallowed the thought and smiled instead *because he’s had practice with that* (and every time he tries to *practice* dying, Mori pieces him back together before he can finish).

Even when he’s not trying, Dazai was always telling jokes. He wasn’t sure whether to be glad the sleeves of his robes went down to his fingers.

“...I’ll try to restrain myself, then.”

Hermione nodded, lips pulled into a thin line. “You’re...” she stopped the words before they can wander too far. With a sigh, the tension drained from her (*almost*). “Everything *is* okay, isn’t it?”

Dazai didn’t say anything—wasn't sure how to say that wanting to die was as normal for him as reading was for her. He scratched at his wrist unconsciously.

“Oh, you aren’t in trouble with your housemates are you? You mentioned you weren’t getting along, but it’s nothing dangerous, right?”

Dazai blinked, lungs tightening at the strong attention. That’s right—he'd told he was being bullied, or some other nonsense. Actually, that was true now, wasn’t it? Pansy’s ultimatum had certainly made it seem like that was a real threat. “Not yet.”

Best to be honest. Hermione was (unknowingly) part of his gang, so she should stay in the loop.

“Not *yet?* You should tell a professor.”

“Snape knows.” *Kind of. “* It’s fine.” *I’m just messing around. “* Anyway, how's your essay coming along?”

Hermione blinked, evidently blindsided enough to drop the issue. “I’m almost done. Can you *believe* there’s a ten-page limit? How am I meant to fully discuss the implications of precise wand movements in *only ten pages?”*

“ Sounds like a you problem.”

She huffed and pulled her books and papers together into a pile. “You’re only saying that because you refuse to do the homework. Which I don’t agree with *at all,* mind you.”

“I remember all the important stuff. Writing it down just feels like a waste of time.”

“*Please* at least try to pass your classes.” she put the rest of her things back into her bookbag (thankfully lighter now that some textbooks had been returned to their shelves). “It’s just about time for dinner. Are you coming?”

“Actually, I’m not feeling that hungry. I think I’ll just turn in for the night.”

Hermione had the gall to look *concerned. Again.“* Are you sure? It’s still early, and lunch was *hours* ago.”

“You know you can go over a month without eating and still live?”

“It is beyond concerning that you’re using *that fact* to justify not eating dinner.”

Dazai shrugged. “I had a big lunch.” He didn’t *eat* lunch. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting!!
see yall next week!

Best Friends

Chapter Summary

Dazai tries to make a poison with limited success.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I want to never wake up again.

A cheery thought to start class with. Promising? Maybe. He *had* been considering attempting suicide tonight. It'd been too long, really, and the allure of magic was starting to lose its touch even just a week and a half into the school year. Dazai glared emptily at the wall, wishing he'd thought to pack some rope for a noose.

"Don't give me that look," Draco hissed. "I wouldn't have to bother you if you'd just *stop falling asleep in class."*

" Make class *exciting*, Draco." he droned, flicking the rim of his cauldron listlessly. "I'm at my limit for *tedious* things."

"What are you on about? Just start making the forgetfulness potion, already. You aren't a very *good* subordinate if *I'm* the one doing all the work here."

From his own workstation (partnered with Pansy, today, that little *rat*), Blaise shot Dazai silent good luck *with him* with his eyes. He returned *thanks, good luck working that that monster Pansy,* but the message might have been too specific to send via look. Blaise turned back to work on his potion, so Dazai considered it a solid *maybe* as to whether his message passed the silent void between them.

He should find the twins and ask them about their *twin telepathy.* It was looking to be an exceptionally helpful skill to have.

The instructions for the potion were spelled out on a chalkboard and again in his textbook. Dazai squinted up at the ingredients list. And—*Step five: Wave your wand.* Dazai blinked. Could he... could he *even make a potion?* Dazai had thought maybe he could at least pass *this* class, since it looked like it was mostly just the wizard equivalence of science, but if *not...*

Dazai glanced at Draco, who was dropping something into their shared cauldron and silently considered suggesting his boss get a new partner to work with. Then again, it was only *Draco* who would be failing by association...

A small idea tickled the back of Dazai's skull.

You could probably make one hell of a poison with this stuff, huh?

He'd skimmed the potions textbook earlier—these things seemed *very* temperamental. Like *one clockwise-turn-that-should-have-been-counterclockwise-results-in-an-explosion* temperamental. And honestly? Dazai liked those odds. He'd spin that wheel of "*how dangerous can I make this assignment out to be?"*

Poor Draco would probably fail, though.

"Oi, *subordinate,* aren't you going to do *anything?"*

Never mind.

Dazai resolved to make the most atrocious potion possible, then. If he was *really* lucky, he'd even get to drink it.

"Can I drink it?"

Snape gave him a *look.* A sort of *I-thought-you-were-on-my-last-nerve-five-minutes-ago-but-you've-made-me-realize-there-are-whole-new-nerves-to-pick-on* look. Or something like that. Draco *also* gave him a look, but Dazai was carefully choosing to ignore the aghast anger there because *ignoring* him made the expression more intense (and it was humorous to watch how pinched together the boy's face could get).

He could look pretty angry, turns out.

"Tell me," Professor Snape said, steamrolling over Dazai's question easily, "Does this look *anything* like the potion you were meant to be making?"

Fair question. The answer was objectively *no,* but Dazai wasn't just going to *say that.* Their potion was decidedly *not* what they had discussed in class the last few days, nor what Snape's sample looked like on his desk, *nor* something any respectable living creature would ever look at and willingly say, "Can I drink it?" to.

Something bubbled to the surface.

Maybe it was one of the extra ingredients he'd dropped in there. There were a lot of items on the shelves Dazai couldn't recognize or identify in the slightest, so he'd taken them all and promptly dropped them into their cauldron. If Draco happened to be chatting with Pansy when this happened... Dazai would maintain that was a coincidence. (Blaise, who happened to be watching all of this go down with growing horror, would *not.*)

Another bubble popped and sizzled over the caldron's rim.

Snape heaved on, expression boiling *almost* as much as Dazai's potion. "The Forgetfulness potion, upon completion, should be orange. Can you tell me what color your *monstrosity* is?"

Like he was speaking to children. Honestly, Dazai got that. Sometimes he felt like was surrounded by idiots too. He'd feel more sympathy if *he* wasn't the idiot child in this situation. You win some you lose some.

"Black." Dazai guessed. Squinting down at the bubbling, viscous mess. "Green? It's kind of hard to tell. Hey, Draco—"

Draco *jumped,* glaring in a way that very much said *I was trying to hide, you idiot! Don't call attention to me!*

"— what color do *you* think it is?"

The look he got in return was probably the most pinched-together, *angriest* look Draco could manage. Dazai tried not to feel too proud.

Suddenly, Snape hissed, "The *color* is hardly the point, Mr. Dazai, Mr. Malfoy!"

"Ooh! That part has a bit of pink in it. I didn't see that..."

"*Mr. Dazai!"*

He blinked.

"Quite frankly," the professor ground out, "I'm not even positive *what* went wrong with this potion. If I weren't so furious with how little respect you paid my instructions, I might ask just what exactly you even *did."*

Throw everything in sight into a pot and ask Draco to throw some magic in, too? Dazai mused, somehow managing to mask a smirk. Probably for the best, that.

"Truly appalling work. Clean your caldron out before it *explodes*."

Snape walked away with the sort of expression Dazai was coming to associate with *speechless horror.* With the professor gone, Dazai turned to offer Draco a pleasant smile.

"That went well, I think."

Draco looked positively enraged*,* which was kind of a good look for him behind all that pompous snark. "What in *Merlin's name* did you do?!" He hissed. "*I* followed the instructions to a T. This *must* have been your fault."

The potion sizzled in agreement. *Rude.*

" And you were doing such a good job guiding me, too." Dazai bemoaned, "I'm hopeless. Even as a *Slytherin,* a no-good muggleborn like myself will always fail."

His light-haired companion stilled, then cleared his throat. “Well, at least you know your place.” Still, that wasn’t a *happy* look as much as it was a *deeply irritated* one that knew when a cause was lost. “And since you know your place *so well,* you’ll know that you’ll be the one scraping this caldron clean.”

Dazai hummed, sinking into himself a bit. He looked up to Blaise for help, but his worthless friend was watching their exchange with a smirk like it was *funny.* Then he turned to his potion for help, but all *it* had to offer was the sound of something that shouldn’t be added to a potion burning up.

“I’ll just drink it, after all. All that work cleaning... I think I’ll just die instead.”

Draco slapped a washcloth into his hands. “You made me fail this assignment and *almost* made us lose house points, had you not been Slytherin. At least clean up before you kill yourself.”

“Isn’t that your fault for partnering up with me?”

Right, he thought belatedly, *self-restraint. I forgot.*

As it happens, Draco *could* look even angrier.

When Dazai left the potions classroom, it was with a heavy sigh and tight shoulders. He couldn’t *believe* Draco had actually left him there to clean out the cauldron! With Snape breathing over his shoulder, nonetheless—meaning Dazai couldn’t even test out his poison! What a waste.

Professor Snape watched him leave with a scowl and a farewell that included both “*that was quite possibly the worst potion I’ve ever seen”* and *“I’m honestly appalled that it didn’t explode” Neither* of which was promising, yet somehow *both* made Dazai want to make an even *worse* potion next class.

“ Dazai!” He startled, glancing up from the floor to see... was that *Ron* approaching him? “What the hell did you do to your potion, mate?”

What’s with all this familiarity?

“ I was trying to make a poison, but *apparently* that’s frowned upon.” He blinked. “Did you need something.? Ah—is this about my offer on Monday?”

At the question, Ron flushed but didn’t pull back. Instead, he took up stride beside Dazai until they were out of the dungeons. “I’ve been thinking about it.”

“And what did your kind little Gryffindor heart of yours decide, after all that soul-searching?”

“I—*what?”*

“ You help me fit in with Gryffindor and I spill Slytherin secrets—it's a good deal. You should take it....” He trailed off. “That’s what you were thinking, I bet.”

Ron gave him a look like Dazai was missing the point, which was *objectively impossible*.

“I was *thinking,”* he said, nearly whispering. “ Sure*,* we can hang out.”

“Oh, really? That worked?” *And so fast?* He’d been *way* off in his estimation of how long Ron would take to come crawling back to him... what had he miscalculated?

“But there are some rules you need to follow as my—as my subordinate. *”*

Dazai nodded and smiled self-assuredly. That wasn’t *unexpected,* especially considering he’d phrased his initial request in terms of another boss-subordinate relationship. If there was one thing Dazai knew about humans, it was that they *craved* power over others. He didn’t mind letting others think they had control over him if it got him what he wanted in the end. (Dazai was still deciding what he actually *wanted* from all these people, but tricking them into trusting him was still fun in the meantime. He was still humoring the idea of starting a magic gang...)

“First,” Ron started, voice growing steadier, and Dazai blinked to attention, “I won’t be seen with a *Slytherin* in public. We can hang out, but only if no one else is around.”

“Sure,” Dazai replied easily. He was still a bit hung-up on how important house reputations were to these brats, but saying so seemed ill-advised. Maybe he’d ask later. *Self-restraint* and all that.

“Second, never, *ever* partner with me in potions.”

“That’s reasonable, actually.”

“And finally,” Ron said, brows scrunched up like the words took an undue amount of effort, “I’m not calling you my subordinate. That’s messed up.”

Dazai blinked.

“Call me your *friend* or the deal is off!”

...huh?

“ Oh... I thought you’d like that.”

There’s something like surprise smothering Dazai from the inside out. He’s never known someone who *wasn’t* motivated by the need to subordinate others—to *dominate* others. That

was certainly the case with Draco and his gang. Although Hermione had also seemed keen on just having someone nearby to call a *friend.*

Maybe that's a Gryffindor thing?

Ron's nose scrunched up. "That's... no."

Dazai shook the blank look from his face and replaced it with an amicable smile. "These are pretty weak demands," taking Ron's hand into his, Dazai initiated a quick hand-shake to settle their deal before Ron could add anything else to his list, "But it's a deal! You're kind of a sucker, though. You should work on negotiating."

The hand wrapped up with Dazai's tightened suddenly, and before Dazai could wiggle his hand free, Ron added hastily, "And *four*... well, I don't have a fourth yet, but when I come up with one, you've got to do that too!"

Dazai stifled a laugh and pulled his hand back (the touch was starting to itch). "That's not how deals work*."*

" We shook on it!"

"I..." He blinked, "I *guess?"*

Ah, hell. Why not? The kid's teasing grin split an equally amused smirk onto Dazai's face, too. They stood in the empty hall for a moment, riding the high of a successful contract forming. After a moment, Ron cleared his throat.

"So? When can I meet your owl?" It looked like he was trying to mask some of that excitement, but the way Ron bounced on his heels was a dead giveaway.

Dazai snorted. "Saturday."

"Not now? We've got time—"

"I've got to send a letter. Might as well do that while we're over there. Only I haven't written it yet, since writing Mori is always a chore."

Ron made a sound like he was just realizing something. He took a step back, almost thoughtfully. "I guess since your folks are muggles, they'll want to hear all about Hogwarts." As an afterthought, he added, "All my siblings except for Ginny have already been here. Mom asked me to write her, but what am I going to say that she hasn't already heard five times before?"

"You could tell her about your new best friend." Dazai hummed.

Ron shot him a look—more annoyed than amused, but Dazai would take what he could get.

It was reassuring, maybe, having Ron back on his side. Don't be confused, Dazai didn't want *friends.* He wanted allies for his schemes. Forming that bond with Ron at Diagon Alley and

having it stolen from him was vaguely infuriating, and Dazai didn't lose. Not even to obscure house loyalties. It was good to have Ron back because that meant he was winning.

Winning what, Dazai could never be sure. But he was *winning,* and no one from the Port Mafia was here, so he was *winning that* too.

The sound of footsteps echoed down the hallway and Ron's spine stiffened. Dazai's would have, too, had he not been growing more accustomed to staying constantly on guard with all these students around.

He hummed. "Rule one, right?"

" Saturday?" Ron replied instead, already taking a step away, "After lunch, in the courtyard. You can take me to see your owl then, alright?"

Without another word, Ron disappeared around the corner, leaving Dazai staring blankly after him. Not a moment later, a light-haired first year with wide, faraway eyes appeared at his side. Dazai couldn't remember her name from the sorting (*Loony, maybe?*), but he smiled wide enough to skip the pleasantries.

"Say, you wouldn't happen to know where the courtyard is, would you?"

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting! y'all are very nice! :)

see yall next week!!

Flying Lessons

Chapter Summary

Flying lessons go... well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai squinted down at the broomstick, then back to Draco.

"It's a *stick.* It's not going to just *shoot up into my hands* because I asked it nicely."

"You aren't asking *nicely,"* the blonde replied, haughty as ever, "You're demanding: *Up!"*

Immediately, the broom beneath Draco's outstretched hand rose into his palm, because *of course it did*. Dazai took great pains to ignore the smug look that crossed his face when that happened. It was hopeless, really, because Draco's obnoxious grin seemed to say, *a good subordinate would praise me.*

While Dazai was pretty sure that he could destroy Draco with a single move and not have to congratulate him at all, Pansy was watching him with a heavy, suspicious glare. And even though he didn't really care if Pansy made him Public Enemy Number One in Slytherin for disrespecting Malfoy, the show of loyalty she had demanded was giving him something to do. Best not to ruin that one quite yet.

At least, best to stay on her good side until Dazai had his gang all put together. As it stood (though he *hated* to admit it), he really *wasn't* all that far off from the *pathetic, helpless muggleborn* Pansy thought him to be. Not without his gang put together yet.

He did have a knife though.

Dazai smiled in a pleasant way that was just fake enough to stay this side of maliciousness. "Ah, Boss is too good~!" He hummed. "Please put me out of my misery!"

"I still need you around to make me look better by comparison."

Dazai let himself chuckle. "But not in potions? Ah~ so cruel..."

Draco didn't grace that with a response, which was probably fair. Instead, he turned to the person on his other side.

Blaise, who annoyingly also has a broom in his hand, answered the silence with a bored-sounding, "I don't know why I'm bothering, but Dazai—did you at least *try* and summon

the broom?"

"Mm?" From across the field, Dazai spotted Ron's broomstick smacking him in the face. When he turned to meet Blaise's quirked brows, he offered a lopsided grin. "I can't be bothered. That seems like a lot of work."

"Saying *'up'* is too much work?"

"I don't know. I've kind of committed myself to the whole *dropout-to-be* persona. It's a bit late to go back on that *now* by putting in the effort*."*

Blaise shot him a look that Dazai wouldn't bother to translate. *"*It's week *two."*

"You'll figure it out *eventually,"* Malfoy chimed in helpfully, "After all, you do have me to coach you. Isn't that right?"

There were definitely some passive-aggressive remarks Dazai could make to that, but a sharp glare from Pansy mellowed him out. "Ehh, I guess that's true. Boss is kind, so he should call my broom up for me."

"Quit being lazy and just do it yourself. Unless I'm going to turn around to find your *broom* exploding just like our *potion* ."

"The potion didn't *explode;* it just sizzled and popped and also might have melted a hole in your cauldron."

"It *what?!"*

" It's fine*."* Dazai waved him off, "I cleaned it like you said too, anyway."

"It's got a *hole."*

" I guess we'll have to partner up again, then. Since I have a cauldron now and you don't. *"*

At the blank stares he received in return, Dazai turned his attention back to the broom at his side. It was *absolutely* not going to float up into his hands like Draco's and Blaise's had. Just standing so close to the broom, Dazai could feel the faint buzz of magic in the object—a sure-fire sign he would nullify whatever made the thing functional.

What a shame! Still, he'd enjoy figuring out how flying brooms worked later in the library.

After a moment of feeling out how the magic was reacting around his peers, Dazai offered his own half-hearted, "Up!"

The broom didn't even twitch, not that Dazai had expected anything else. The gleeful look on Pansy's face was a bit uncalled for, though.

Dazai blinked, trying for a sheepish look, "Do you think it's just shy?"

"Do you need to me show you how a *proper* wizard does it again?"

Before Dazai could think of a suitably ancillary response, the flight instructor, Madam Hooch, was standing in front of them. She looked tense—or maybe annoyed—and when she spoke there was an air of authority about her.

"A *proper wizard,"* She practically hissed the words, "Should know how to hold a broom correctly. Which, Mr. Malfoy, *you* are not."

Draco's mouth dropped open, aghast, and Dazai tried to restrain his amusement.

"As for *you,* Mr. Dazai. Let's try again—with more feeling this time."

At his side, Draco didn't even *bother* trying to hide *his* amusement. Brat.

"Up!"

His broom was evidently unimpressed with Dazai's idea of *more feeling* because it stayed as unmoving as during his last attempt.

He looked to Madam Hooch with a dull expression, feeling a bit tense with how closely she was watching him. For a second, Dazai wondered if she had realized he didn't *actually have magic*, but all the professor did was sigh.

"These brooms are getting a bit old. Seems this one's finally bit the dust. Maybe Dumbledore will finally listen when I tell him we need some newer models down here now." She remarked, "Mr. Malfoy, switch brooms with Mr. Dazai, here. He'll need something to practice with until I can pull an extra broom from storage later today."

"Wha—!?"

"I'll be instructing the other students on how to float on their brooms. Please continue working on calling your broom for now. Unfortunately, we haven't enough time for you to do both now."

She left to the front of the class, making an announcement to gather everyone's attention. While Draco sputtered next to him, Dazai realized that everyone else in the class had already called their brooms and were holding them at their sides.

"Hurry up and call it, Dazai!" Draco whisper-yelled, "I want to take it flying before class is up!"

Dazai smirked. "I'm hurrying, I'm hurrying. It's just that I'm not a *pure wizard* so it might take me a while, Boss."

He was just about to try again (to no results, surely), when a shout caught his attention.

"Mr. Longbottom! Come back down this instant!"

Dazai blinked. Neville was flying away—and looking rather worse-off for it. Hooch called after him, but Neville's broom continued to shoot him across the campus wildly. Just inches from smashing into the castle walls, it spun out into a different direction at random. Shouts

and cries accompanied Neville until the boy *finally* fell from his broom and smacked back onto the ground.

Dazai whistled. He knew before Madam Hooch had even rushed over to Neville's side that the boy's wrist was broken—he was familiar with how unnatural the bend of bone was from the countless bones he'd broken himself. Dazai offered his own silent sympathies into the crowd of hushed whispers.

"Everyone is to keep their feet firmly on the ground while I take Mr. Longbottom to the hospital wing," Madam Hooch helped Neville to his feet and guided him back to the castle, "If I see a single broom in the air, the one riding it will find themselves out of Hogwarts before I can say *Quidditch* ."

"Hey, Boss, what's Quidditch—Oh, you have a thing."

Draco clutched a small, clear orb in his hands and wore the sharp grin he usually reserved for bullying. "It's Longbottom's remembrall—turns red when you forget something. Maybe if he had given this a squeeze, he'd have remembered to fall on his fat ass."

Most of the Slytherins laughed, which only really stood to make Draco's Bullying Smile pointier at the edges. Dazai held his tongue, but watched on with idle humor, relishing in human cruelty as one might enjoy a lovely painting.

But the Gryffindors... Dazai watched as Hermione's features pinched together in anger and as Ron became affronted on Neville's behalf. Insulting Neville had become *insulting Gryffindor*. He was starting to get the whole "your house is your family" schtick Professor McGonagall had imparted on the sorting day. Back at the Port Mafia, this sort of disrespect could get your fingers chopped off if you said something about the wrong person.

While Draco flaunted his stolen remembrall, Dazai silently considered who he should back. He had ties to both Gryffindor *and* Slytherin, after all. After a second of listening to Draco ramble on and contemplate using a broom to hide the ball on top of one of the towers, Dazai decided.

He plucked the remembrall straight from Draco's hands, ignoring the shocked annoyance that flickered across the boy's face in response. The second the magical item was in his palm, Dazai felt *No Longer Human* burst to life from its resting state of *kind -of-active.* Whatever magic had been powering that item withered and died immediately, leaving only a glass ball in the aftermath.

And— *oh. No Longer Human* returned to its passive state even though the remembrall was still in his hands, which meant whatever magic had powered the ball was well and truly gone. Dazai tossed it up and caught it again. Was this just a regular glass ball now for good? How curious. Hopefully Neville wouldn't mind that his remembrall didn't do anything anymore. Dazai gave it another toss. *Nope,* the magic didn't flicker back to life while it was in the air. *Just a regular ball then. Oops.*

" What do you think you're doing?" Draco hissed. Crabbe and Goyle bumbled into place beside him, looking as indistinguishable and dull as ever.

“Just taking a look. I think it’s broken.”

The *I just broke this* was left completely unsaid.

“It’s *charmed,* it won’t break from a *fall*. Now hand it back so I can hide it somewhere.”

Dazai didn’t hand it back even though Draco’s hand was outstretched and expectant. Instead, he grinned his own version of the Bully Smile and pseudo-whispered, “I have a better idea, Boss. Why not *give it back?”*

Draco’s frown turned outright vitriolic, which was a fun look to be on the receiving side of.

He tossed the remembrall to Pansy without warning, smirking when it *almost* smacked into her face before she caught it. “It’s broken, see? Should be turning red, because I’m pretty sure Pansy forgot we have an essay due tomorrow in History.”

“We have a *what?!”*

“See?” Dazai asked under his breath, smirking, “Wouldn’t it be so much more fun to give it back and to make him think it was still working? You can bully him about being too stupid to notice later.”

Draco blinked, dumbfounded. After a second, he pasted a sloppy grin onto his face and snatched the remembrall back from Pansy. “Listen up, you stupid Gryffindor’s,” he declared, “I’m going to give this back because I’m feeling generous. You can thank me now!”

There was stunned silence for a few seconds before Hermione took the remembrall and pulled it close to her chest protectively.

Blaise caught Dazai’s eye over Draco’s head while the blonde demanded a *thank you.* His gaze seemed to say, *aren’t you clever?* Or maybe that was, *still playing the idiot, aren’t you?* Blaise, Dazai discovered, was very adept in the language of *gazes* and *eyebrow raises*. He tried to send a look back saying as much, but couldn’t manage to do that many things with his face at one time.

Dazai found a nice, private seat in the back of the library and glared down at the empty paper before him. He was sure no one was going to bother him (well, *mostly sure*), but that didn’t mean he was at all ready to get started on this damn thing. His letter to Mori, that was—not his History essay, because Dazai wasn’t going to bother with that.

Talking to Mori always made his stomach do turns, and *writing* to Mori wasn’t really much different.

“Dear Mori,”

No, no, that was too polite. It implied Dazai *liked* his doctor, and he couldn't have that. He scratched it out and tried again,

"*Mori,*

If I knew what information you wanted me to collect, this letter would be much easier to write. I won't forgive you for that."

He wouldn't. This whole assignment was underlaid by a deep level of annoyance simply because he had *no idea* why he was even here. Especially since...

"*I don't have any magic. No Longer Human nullifies everything here, but you probably already knew that. I'll be failing all of my classes, but I'll stick around because you can't stop me from killing myself while you're still back in Yokohama."*

That was good. Concise, to-the-point. Just insubordinate enough to get across that he found Mori deeply tedious to deal with. It also included a not-so-subtle prod asking for the objective for this assignment, because Dazai wasn't sure what these bi-weekly updates were meant to include otherwise. He sighed. There was still...

Dazai felt his chest clench, felt his breathing stop, felt like he *had to know* even if he didn't *want* to. That thing he'd been avoiding since he made a deal with Mori to *go* to Hogwarts in the first place... He put the quill back to paper and wrote in perfect script,

"How is my father, doctor?"

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting!!!

see yall next Saturday!!

Ron Finally Sees That Owl

Chapter Summary

Ron has a different definition for "friend" than Dazai does. Go figure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai didn't eat dinner. More specifically, he didn't even go down to the Great Hall. It was always too crowded and the smell of food would just make him nauseous. Also, if he didn't start looking early, he was *never* going to find the courtyard. Dazai had learned pretty quickly that even if he figured out the path there *one day,* that didn't mean it was going to be the same path the *next.*

Moving staircases were not even remotely practical, but apparently that wasn't an acceptable excuse for being late to class five days in a row.

On a totally unrelated note, Dazai was racking up detentions pretty quickly.

He sat on a stone bench and read while he waited for Ron to show up. The library had all sorts of books, but until Dazai could figure out the official relationship between abilities and magic, he was stuck reading history books.

The relationship between magic and abilities seemed pretty clear to him, but none of the books he'd read at the library even *mentioned* abilities. It was... curious. Dazai had checked out a few books that seemed useful on the subject, but still to no avail. The only plus side to all this reading was that Dazai now knew functionally everything there was to know about magical history, even if *none* of it involved abilities as he'd hoped.

With a put-upon sigh, Dazai shut the tome he was reading. Next, he'd move onto books about the foundations of magic—maybe that would prove more helpful.

"Dazai!"

"Ron," he perked up at the whispered shout and returned the book to his bag. "You're sure in a rush."

The red-head panted, hands sinking to his knees. There was a thin sheen of sweat on his brow that Ron wiped off with the sleeve of his robe. "I had to run all the way here! Everyone else will be coming out soon."

"And you won't be seen with a Slytherin." Dazai surmised, amused. "Rule One. I remember."

“R-right.” Ron took a deep breath. “Let’s go see this owl, then!”

“So eager! I guess just hanging out with your best friend isn’t good enough if I have to bribe you to see me.”

Ron pulled a face—a mix of ashamed and cautious if Dazai was reading that correctly. Still, he didn’t pay it any mind when he stood from the bench and drew his bookbag further up his shoulders. What a curious expression! Gryffindors were really quite different from Slytherins—maybe Ron was right not to want to associate with his kind.

“So,” Dazai grinned, “Where are the owls, anyway?”

“Wha— Haven’t you been down to see your owl at all?”

Visit his stupid, annoying owl? No thanks. “Why would I? I only just finished my letter home anyway.”

“Still...” Ron pouted. “They’re your pet! You ought to care for them properly.”

“Don’t you hate your rat? How is this any different?” Almost as an afterthought, he added, “Where is that rat of yours, anyway?”

After a moment of blank staring, Ron let out a breath like dealing with Dazai was a lost cause—which is an accurate assessment, but Dazai was still choosing to take offense for the principle of it. “It’s this way, come on.” With that, the red-head started walking off in a seemingly random direction. Knowing this school, it may of well have been random. It’s not like he would ever be able to tell the difference. “And Angel is fine. Probably.”

“Probably? That’s promising.”

Ron shot him a look over his shoulder until Dazai skipped half-a-step to catch up. “He’s always wandering off. He’s just as bad as you!”

“I don’t wander off .” Dazai huffed. “And don’t compare me to your creepy rat.”

“Don’t you? You’re always late for class. ‘Cept for when that no-good Draco is with you.”

“You’re welcome to walk me to class yourself... Ah~ I didn’t peg you for being the jealous type.”

Ron flushed, “I’m not *jealous!* I just don’t think you should be hanging around with a slimy guy like Draco! Besides, I thought...”

“Hm?” Dazai blinked and skipped ahead until he was a few feet in front of Ron. The other boy continued to hold his tongue. The mafioso whirled on his heels, continuing backward. “Well, that was ominous. You thought what?”

“Nothing!” After a pause, he added with a pout, “I hope you trip.”

Dazai rolled his eyes but did watch his step when they started walking up a flight of stairs. As they drew farther up the tower, he let himself fall back in step beside Ron just in time to hear *hooting* and *cooing* coming from overhead. After the last few steps, the room opened up into a tall, circular space. The walls had large windows with no glass on them, and Dazai noticed a few owls flying in-and-out of them seemingly at random.

“So? Which one’s yours?”

“Hm?” Dazai blinked. Did he just step on a *mouse’s skull*? The floor was littered with bones and half-eaten rodent corpses. “Someone needs to clean this place.”

Ron motioned erratically at what must have been a hundred owls lining the walls. “Your *owl,* mate.”

Kicking over a small pile of vole bones, Dazai resigned himself to Ron’s clear excitement. It was a small act of gratitude in return for showing him where the owlery was because Dazai *knew* he’d get lost otherwise. Hermione still hadn’t made him a map. Maybe he should bring it up again...“I don’t know. Which one seems most annoying to you?

Ron’s brow pinched together, and Dazai thought he could convince himself that sort of expression was amused and not annoyed if he tried hard enough.

“It's grey.” Dazai tried. “It likes to scream when I'm trying to read. Oh! I brought a book. I bet it’ll show up if I’m trying to do something important that requires concentration.”

His stupid owl *would* be like that. It's a universal law that Dazai isn’t allowed good things, and that includes pets that shut up while he’s trying to work. The fact that Dazai considered Ron almost like a pet in no way contradicted this point.

“No need for that,” Ron made a face, “Just whistle, or something. Owls are good like that with their owners.” He bit his lip, adding tersely, “And quit calling your owl *it,* Dazai. They’re a living creature, y’know. Ought to respect that.”

“It’s an owl*,* what does it know?”

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but before he could say anything, Dazai’s whistled as loud as he could. The red-head immediately clamped his hands over his ears and shot a scowl his way.

“Give me a warning! *Hell...*"

“Didn’t you say to whistle? Anyway, it didn’t even—”

A dark grey owl fluttered down onto Dazai’s head, talons folding into his chocolate hair as if it had a right to be there.

“ —Oh, it did work. Look at that.”

Ron might have glared at him, but there was an *owl,* and Dazai was quickly coming to understand “*I want to see your owl,”* was Ron’s one defining character trait. Instead, his face

split into a cheery grin and his eye lights glimmered.

A hooked claw dug into Dazai's scalp.

(At least his pets were getting along just fine.)

"She's *awesome,* mate."

"You can have it. I mean, I need it to send some letters, but we can still call it *your owl."*

This time, Ron *did* glare at him. Whether it was the look or the way Dazai had been trying to smack it, the owl flew from his head and onto a nearby stone ledge.

"You're impossible! At least tell me you've named her."

Dazai blinked.

"She doesn't have a name!?" Ron whined, voice pitching as his frustration finally bubbled over like a potion with too many ingredients tossed in. "How come you get an owl when you don't even care for her!?"

"Ah, was I supposed to name it? Is that a wizard thing?"

"What—" he balked, "It's a *pet* thing, Dazai! You've got to name your pets!"

"It's annoying, this owl." Dazai huffed. "It doesn't deserve a name. Maybe if it earns my respect first—"

"You really *are* impossible."

"The *owl's* impossible! You should have heard it when I was trying to study earlier! Wouldn't shut up even when I threatened to kill it!"

"You— *what?!"* Ron balked, arm shooting out protectively in front of the owl. "That's it— you're not allowed pets anymore, Dazai. I'm taking her away from you!"

"Be my guest."

"And *I'll* give her a proper name! Like Hedwig... or Sirius!"

"What about Featherbrain, since the damn thing won't do what I tell it to?"

The owl hooted cheerfully.

Ron blinked.

"...She was responding to Hedwig."

When the owl didn't so much as ruffle a feather, Dazai chuckled. "I don't know... Do you think it's stupid enough to like my name suggestion?"

“You were making fun of her! Of course she doesn’t like the name Featherbrain!”

An overjoyed chirp immediately followed Ron’s outburst. Without warning, the owl took to the air and circled around their heads.

“Oh, it definitely likes Featherbrain. Stupid bird.”

“I refuse to believe this.” Ron backpedaled; mouth agape when the owl landed delicately on Dazai’s chocolate-brown hair again, clearly not caring about how tense the boy went in response. “I refuse to believe any animal could ever like you.”

“If it’s any consolation,” Dazai offered, weakly swiping at the owl embedding itself in his hair, “I think this bird is just too stupid to realize I couldn’t care less about it.”

“That’s worse, you idiot!”

“Well, maybe. Still better than a rat for a pet, though.”

“Oi!”

When Featherbrain started preening his hair, Dazai gave up trying to knock it off. He shot a withered look to Ron instead and pulled the neatly folded envelop from his bookbag. “I wonder if a bird as hopeless as this even knows how to deliver a letter."

“She’ll do *great,* won’t you, girl?”

Dazai’s lips quirked into a lopsided grin. He quietly considered the benefits of Featherbrain getting lost and losing his letter—or losing Mori’s reply. It wasn’t an entirely unpleasant thought. “I’m sure it’ll try it’s best.” He said. “Which isn’t very good*,* but maybe it’ll be enough .”

He gave the letter a wave through the air. “Here, bird, take this to Mori.”

“*Bird...* You just named her.”

“If anything, it named itself.”

Featherbrain took the letter into its beak without complaint, which Dazai thought was odd for such an annoying bird. He gave it a light pat on the head in congratulations because a little positive reinforcement never went amiss. The smug grin on Ron’s face made him almost wish he’d just smacked Featherbrain instead.

Still, the owl *cooed* underneath Dazai’s hand. He gave it a little shake. “Go on and take that to Mori, Featherbrain. Maybe tear up some papers on his desk while your there. Go crazy.”

So much for self-restraint, but it wasn’t like Mori was here to *punish him.*

With a *hoot*, Featherbrain let go of Dazai’s hair, flying up and out an opening in the wall. Featherbrain was *fast* —she was just a dot in the far sky before Dazai was even fully aware

the weight on his head had vanished. Ron watched her disappear with something like awe in his eyes.

“You’re so lucky! ”

Dazai ruffled his hair, pouting when bits of sand shook out of it. “I wouldn’t say *lucky*, but I suppose someone with a pet rat would say that.”

“Hey, let off Angel, will you?” But even as he said it, Ron didn’t seem to believe his own words. He sighed. “Ah, whatever... Thanks for letting me see your owl.”

Dazai kicked a half-eaten mouse on the stone floor, barely flinching when a large, white owl swooped in to swallow the rest of it. Ron had said that Angel disappeared, right? He shook himself. “No problem. I mean, it was part of our deal.”

Ron watched the owl devour its prey with boyish eager, then looked to Dazai with a strange expression painted on his face. “I meant as a friend. That was a nice thing to do.”

It was Dazai’s turn to wear an odd expression—*vague distress.* He wasn’t *nice.* Not by any stretch of the imagination. He wanted to say, “*I’ve killed people. I’m unsalvageable,”* but didn't, because that's not a normal thing to say at all.

When Dazai didn’t respond immediately, Ron turned away to watch the owls fly over their heads. After a moment of silence basked in the air between them, Ron made a thoughtful, almost cautious, sound.

“...I’ll be honest. I wasn’t going to accept your... *deal.”*

“ Oh?”

“Because friendships aren’t the type of thing you *shake on.* And you’re a Slytherin*,* so you must be up to something. No good lot that you are.”

He blinked. “Really filling me with confidence here.”

Was this tower high enough to kill him if he jumped off?

“But,” Ron didn’t meet his eyes, but Dazai could see a tint of pink to his cheeks. “You aren’t actually manipulative*,* right? You’re just lonely *.”*

“I—”

What? No, *no, no*— he *was* manipulative! Where was Ron getting his information from?! It was like everyone at this damn school—and their stupid impossible to understand hallways—thought he was just a helpless little worm! He’s *killed people,* for goodness’ sake! People like that—*things like him*—didn't get lonely. Dazai felt himself grow tense at the clear miscalculation on Ron's part.

(If his chest stung, Dazai didn't think to dwell on it. Maybe he was getting sick.)

Dazai's entire body locked up defensively at Ron's assessment. A weary frown pasted itself protectively over his face.

Ron's expression softened in the way that a young child's does—like he ought to be sad, but didn't quite know how to put pity into his expression. Blaise would know. Blaise *always* knew how to make his face say what he was thinking. "Hermione was right, then."

Dazai felt himself still, Hermione's "*Don't joke about something like that!"* still an echo in his head. His frown deepened.

"*That's* why you agreed to be my boss? Because Hermione was talking about me?"

"She's always talking about you." His brows pinched together at the word *boss*—because *of course, it did.* Dazai was never going to be able to read Ron at this rate if he kept pretending things like *friends* and *pity* were real things that something like Dazai deserved. "I was just going to ignore her, but she thinks you're being bullied and that you want to... to kill yourself. And I remember talking with you on the train and you weren't so bad..."

All this attention—Dazai was going to be sick. What is this? He was supposed to be the one leading people on, but here he was: backed into a corner by nothing more than concerned words. He should have just killed himself before even sending the letter. At least he wouldn't have had to listen to this nonsense first.

"So we're friends even if you are a Slytherin, because I don't think you make a very good snake, either. Slytherins aren't nice. And they don't go out of their way to make friends with a Gryffindor." Ron finished; face flushed like he'd just run a marathon. "Thanks for letting me see your owl. That was nice of you."

Ah... what was he meant to say in a situation like this? All at once, the term "friend" wasn't a synonym for dog or subordinate, it was something that's burning a hole in Dazai's skull.

He was *not* nice.

" Are you coming?" Ron asked, already headed towards the stairs once more. "I bet someone else'll be coming here soon."

Dazai ran his nails over his wrist.

"Right."

Hogwarts was full of crazy people.

(Dazai tasted the word friend on his tongue.)

Chapter End Notes

happy wednesday i guess LOL

next update is Saturday!
thanks for reading and commenting!

Equal Footing

Chapter Summary

Snape and Dazai have a quick chat.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Remind me how this happened again?"

Dazai carefully ignored Ron's piercing gaze as he dropped something mossy and solid into the cauldron. " Well," he hummed, "Draco refuses to work with me for no reason whatsoever—"

"*There's a reason.* "

"—and Hermione *also* refuses to work with me, since she wants to actually pass this class or something. And since Blaise is always partnered with Pansy and every other Slytherin hates my guts, you *kindly* offered to partner with me for potions!"

"I don't remember it happening like that," Ron grumbled. "I clearly recall you declaring yourself my partner *without* asking. In clear violation of Rule Two, mind you."

"Rules were made to be broken. Especially Rule Two." Dazai flapped his hands haphazardly. "Besides, we aren't even working with the same cauldron, so it's fine."

As if the words had just reminded him, Ron surreptitiously scooted his cauldron further from Dazai. "Please don't find loopholes to the only three rules I gave you."

Dazai beamed. He also tossed a handful of vaguely bone-like objects into his cauldron.

They were, notably, not found anywhere on the ingredients list. Dazai wasn't even really sure what they were, but they *looked* poisonous. Or something. Ron seemed to be trying very hard not to look his way.

He picked a few slugs off the table and inspected them. Yes—these would do just fine is his poison. Dazai had a general idea of what was meant to go in which first-year potions. Really, any deviation from that standard was liable to be excessively deadly. He dropped three whole slugs into his brew. The resulting hiss the potion made was satisfying in a life-threatening sort of way.

"What in Merlin's name are you doing?"

Dazai didn't glance up, preoccupied with chopping up something that looked slimy and unappetizing. Still, he could feel the glare of Snape and his classmates on him. "Potions."

The professor made a noise. "Not by traditional standards. Need I remind you what happened last time you made up a recipe, boy?"

"No. I remember."

Suddenly, the potion he was mixing vanished before him. Dazai pouted, giving his best kicked-puppy expression to Snape.

The man glared, nonplussed. "Talk to me after class. And—" he slammed his hands down on the edge of the cauldron. "—do not attempt another potion this period."

"Are you telling me to slack off?"

At his side, Ron harshly elbowed him. Seeming to notice the rough exchange, Snape grunted and turned to leave with a final scathing glare. Ron nudged him again.

"Are you trying to get a detention?! Talking back to Snape like that!"

"Huh? I'd tell him you told me to say it, then." Dazai shrugged. "He'd believe one of his snakes."

"Oi!" The red-head barked. "I don't have to hang around you, y'know! I'd certainly be better off working with Gryffindors!"

Rolling his eyes, Dazai leaned back against the table. "Aww, but you love me!"

"I most certainly do not!"

Dazai heard the footsteps just a second before the hand settled down on his shoulder. He tried not to flinch, but the pinched look Snape wore standing over him wasn't very promising. "Enough distracting your classmates now."

"Sorry, sir."

"Sir." Ron echoed.

Once Snape was gone again, Dazai whined quietly, "Another failed suicide attempt!"

The red-head shot him a barely concealed glare—mixed with just enough concern that Dazai opted for a closed-eye smile so he wouldn't have to see it.

"Say, Ron, can I test your potion?"

"This is definitely wrong, mate." The boy whispered, a hint of bitterness in his voice as he observed the bubbling, puke-green potion with suspicion. "You'll get sick for sure."

"Or die, right?"

The long-suffering sigh he got in return was almost loud enough to draw Snape's attention back to them. Luckily, the sound of Neville's potion exploding was just ever-so-slightly louder.

Once the rest of the class had cleared out—Ron beside Hermione, shooting an obscured glance back to Dazai, and Blaise beside Pansy, sending Dazai a look that spoke way too many things at once—Snape cleared his throat. Dazai drew himself up taller.

"You wanted to speak to me, sir?"

Professor Snape's eyes were little beetles boring into Dazai's skull silently. Whatever that stare was trying to say, all Dazai could think was *danger!*

Punishment—that was a *punishment stare,* right? Like when he did something wrong back home and he had his finger broken or his ribs caved in or he had to sleep with the dogs. His heart stopped and his breathing stilled with the tension of standing below his better. This wasn't Hermione's concern or Ron's friendship; this was something *genuine.* For once*,* something in this godforsaken school that made sense! Dazai was going to be punished. It was an honest relief, to see Snape's expression and to be able to understand his intentions.

Danger! Screamed Dazai's brain.

Somewhere along the way, terror and relief had gotten themselves mixed up.

Dazai braced himself for the hit Snape would surely give him with something almost like sick, palpable satisfaction

"I spoke with Poppy—Madam Pomfrey yesterday."

His crime laid bare on the table, and next came the swift hit—

"Care to explain why you failed to heed my instructions to see her as soon as possible?"

(The reprieve of not being *hit* had lost its effect almost immediately after coming to Hogwarts, because surely, *surely* these kids were being put in their place *somehow.*)

"Sir," Dazai began, feeling the familiar script put him at ease (the crooked beating of his heart was... unrelated, surely), "I'd just.... forgotten. With how busy classes have been."

Professor Snape raised a solitary brow. "Is that right?" He glowered. "Perhaps your other classes are different, but I seem to recall you not doing a single assignment I've given you."

Different tactic, then—

“My arm is fine, anyway. It’s been a long time.” It *had* been, and he was exceptionally good at stitching things up. Besides, that cut had been pretty shallow compared to some of his other self-harm wounds.

...would saying that put Snape at ease?

“It healed up after a few days.” Was what he offered instead.

Snape’s stare didn’t relent. It was an odd stare, really. When Mori or Father were punishing him, there was *eye contact.* Piercing eyes that said, *I’m looking at a dog.* But Snape’s eyes weren’t speaking, they were looking. Looking at his bandages and the little scars on his face Dazai didn’t bother to cover up and the gaunt fill of his cheeks.

Dazai was left trying to figure out what *looking eyes* did for punishment that *speaking eyes* did not. It was difficult to say, really, because those eyes conveyed nothing at all except for *looking,* and *watching,* and *maybe* saying *go to the nurse when I tell you to.*

But that was neither here nor there.

Dazai offered a smile. It was the absent sort, because if Snape was going to have eyes that didn’t say a thing at all, then Dazai was going to smile like he was just as empty-headed.

“I do not mean to imply anything,” When Professor Snape finally spoke again, his voice with tight—tense. Saying something without really saying anything, and his eyes were caught on Dazai’s sleeve. “But I would encourage *you* to see Madam Pomphrey regardless if you’ve healed. Although I am beginning to see that simply asking may not be motivation enough.”

Oh, the punishment. *Finally.* Dazai was almost starting to think Professor Snape had gotten himself so distracted by looking at Dazai’s bandages that he’d forgotten about that. Dazai braced himself for the hit—

“For each day you do not visit the Matron, I will be taking off five house points.”

...

What.

What?

That can’t—that can’t *possibly* be his punishment. *House points?!* He hadn’t even listened when those boring things got explained after the sorting! Draco had had to explain it to him afterward, and even then Dazai hadn’t really listened.

What kind of punishment didn’t involve begging for mercy?

Ah... should he beg?

“Sir,” Dazai steeled himself, almost anticipating the slap even now. But what came out was not steel nor certain, and was instead a quite flustered sounding thing. “Are you—that is to say—*house points?”*

“ Unless you’d rather I escort you over to the medical wing right now, boy. Or add another detention to your quite impressive collection thus far.”

He was going to spend the rest of his year here hopping from one detention to the next. It was all just... *unnerving.* Because even in detention, Dazai did nothing but *sit quietly* or *work on homework he wasn’t going to turn in* or *clean the cauldrons he’d melted.*

Even then, he wasn’t getting hurt. It was always just house points, or something else benign.

It was always just something else.

“... I’ll go there now.” Dazai replied, almost hesitant with the thought that at some point, the real punishment must be coming. He still felt a bit off-center with how unpredictable the whole conversation had just gone. Surely, if he'd been talking to Mori or Father just now... He just had to stay vigilant. “ Sir.”

Dazai was so vigilant that the moment he stepped out of the potions classroom after being dismissed, he immediately barreled directly into someone.

Two someones.

“ Fred. George.” Dazai said, blinking. He drew himself back a step while the twins recovered form him charging into them. It was... *odd.* Lately, everyone had been doing things he didn’t expect. He hadn’t seen the twins since long before he was sorted Slytherin, and as things were, Dazai didn’t feel confident enough to say whether they were on good standing or not. Especially with these nasty house loyalties always being more important than he expects.

The twins shared a look, and—

“Dazai!”

“Fancy meeting you here, all alone in the dungeons.”

Looking them over cautiously, Dazai offered something like a grin. “Outside my classroom?”

George waved the question off and Fred picked up the motion, saying, “Professor Snape doesn’t teach class again ‘till after lunch. Can’t really blame us for asking. So, what’s got the little snakey staying late down here?”

“Probably detention. You heard what Ron was saying.”

Oh, great. Ron talked about him. More of that misleading *nice* nonsense the boy had spit at him, too.

Dazai interrupted them before that could go too far. Seeming kind was never advantageous. Not back home where mercy equated to broken bones. “If that's all, I have a date with the lake and the brick I’m going to tie to my ankle.”

Again, Fred and George shared a look. That "*we’re having a private twin talk"* look.

Everyone here was insufferable.

“ Actually,” one twin said, taking Dazai’s shoulders in his hands and guiding him down the hall.

“We were hoping you could do something for us instead.” The other finished, grinning.

Dazai slapped the hands off his shoulders but didn’t stop following the twins out of the dungeons. Dazai felt a trickle of suspicious curiosity run up his spine. He shot a backward glance to where Snape's office was disappearing behind them.

“And that something is?”

Fred beamed. *“* Ron informed us—”

“Well, not us, per se, but he and Hermione were *awful* loud.”

“—that you were looking to get in the business of selling Slytherin secrets.”

“For pranking.” George amended.

“Or other things.”

“Or other things.” He amended, “But mostly just pranking.”

Oh. Dazai blinked. He could do that. Just more people who wanted him as their subordinate, then. Dazai hid his thrill of excitement beneath a carefully pleasant expression. He was finally spreading his roots into the other houses! As his influence spread around the castle, so too did his gang. It wouldn't be long before everyone here accepted his as the boss of Hogwarts. Dazai stifled a laugh.

When Dazai smiled, the twins’ grins grew ten-fold.

“Well, if that’s the case, I’ll give you this one for free,” he hummed, bouncing on his heels with a bit of misplaced excitement, “Rumor has it, Draco did something to Neville’s remembrall—”

It was good to be on equal footing again. Now if everyone would just stop pretending to be concerned about him, maybe he could make some heading on really *starting this magic gang.*

And Pansy’s show of loyalty. Couldn’t forget about that.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting <3
next chapter Saturday!

A Plant Analogy

Chapter Summary

Unsurprisingly, Dazai does not visit the nurse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The presence of Fred and George was *disgustingly* reassuring. Dazai wasn't willing to dissect exactly why, but he was starting to think it was because they knew an absurd amount about how to navigate Hogwarts. Like, *way too much.* Since reuniting with them, Dazai had learned about approximately five secret passages.

Now, Dazai loved knowing about secret passages. For one, he could *remember where they were*. Two, he always appreciated having the opportunity to hide at a moment's notice. But wasn't knowing about even just one secret passage kind of a lot? He'd breached the subject with them only once.

(*"Have you got a map or something?"*

"Haha... What's this secret of Goyle's again?"

"...Why did you laugh like that.")

Things were dodgy at best, but Dazai *really did* like having the twins around. They were fun—they took his information as a means to include him in pranks rather than just running off. It was sort of strange, but Dazai liked it. He always liked casually sabotaging Draco, but that was neither-here-nor-there.

They could not, however, distract from the searing weight of Mori's letter in his hands.

"Your owl*,"* someone hissed, "Is standing in my dinner."

Dazai masked the nervousness behind his features. Instead, he pulled a blank face and raised a brow at Draco's scrunched up expression. He slipped the letter into his bookbag. "How is that my fault?"

Draco gave Featherbrain a shove and smirked when it made a squeak and took off into the air. "A *pure wizard* keeps their animals in check. I guess I'll have to teach you basic pet care, too."

I think Ron's already got that one covered. Thanks.

“ Aww, you’d do that for me? Draco is so generous!”

Draco somehow managed to put on an expression that was both insulted and proud at the same time. Dazai took it in stride. The dining hall was beginning to feel a bit stuffy, and distracting himself with Draco’s condescension wasn’t as effective as it usually was. The letter in his bookbag wasn’t helping matters—the weight of whatever Mori had to say was making it difficult to keep the apathetic look on his face.

He had asked about Father—

“ Well, that’s it for me,” Dazai said with an exaggerated yawn, getting to his feet.

Blaise regarded him oddly. “You didn’t eat.”

“He’s just going to hang out with those Weasely twins again, aren’t you!” Draco spat, as if the words were poison on his tongue.

Dazai shrugged—maybe he *would* go find Fred and George. Clear his head before seeing what Mori had to say. He tilted his head down at Draco. “I’m only gathering Gryffindor secrets for you, Boss. Gaining their trust was easy since they’re *—what do you call them —* blood traitors.”

“Well, all this 'snooping′ you do looks a lot like *palling around.”* He grumbled. “And it hasn’t paid off, has it?”

“Only because there’s nothing going on.” Dazai made a thoughtful sound. “Oh, I guess Neville knows his remembrall is broken, so you won’t be able to tease him about it later. He threw it out.”

Blaise quirked a brow. “Wonder how that happened.”

“Me too. It’s a real mystery.”

“You know what the *real* mystery is?” Pansy interrupted. Her eyes were on Draco and Blaise —pointedly ignoring Dazai’s presence, but he listened in rapt attention just to spite her. “What in the hell happened to all our house points?” At Draco’s frown, she clarified, “We had plenty the other day, but this morning Professor Snape told me we were short twenty-five points .”

“That’s crazy,” Dazai intoned, “Is it Saturday already?”

Blaise made a choking noise and looked him over with a curious downturn to his lips. “...What?”

“What do you think, Draco?” Pansy talked right over him. In her desperation to exclude Dazai from Slytherin, she didn’t stop to consider that he had basically incriminated himself in the Mystery of the Missing Points.

Draco took a moment to think, although Dazai thought the pause was mostly for show. After a moment, he suggested, “I bet it was Dazai. I’m clearly not training him well enough.”

“Aww, don’t be so harsh on yourself!” He whined, “It wasn’t me, Boss.”

It was totally him. Not that Dazai ever intended on going to the nurse for a checkup to fix this “mystery.” Slytherin would be in the negatives by next week if he had anything to say about it. The thought of anyone looking under his bandages filled him with almost as much dread as the letter in his bookbag gave him now.

Dazai didn’t waste any more time standing around and chatting. He was eager to get out of there and read Mori’s reply—or he was eager to find a better distraction. One or the other, Dazai didn’t care, but talking with Draco was a chore more than it was a distraction at this point. Draco was fun to mess with, sure, but he was also a special kind of annoying.

Blaise waved a cool goodbye and Pansy glared at him with enough force to push Dazai out of the Great Hall.

He decided to go to the library to read his letter. It was quiet, private and he’d finally figured out how to get there thanks to one of the twins’ secret passages. Without a care for who may have thought it odd, Dazai fled the Great Hall halfway through dinner with his stomach just as empty as when he had come in.

Getting to where he wanted—the library—was much easier these days. Granted, the library was just about the only place outside of the dungeons Dazai knew how to get to, but it was an improvement. Courtesy of a few shortcuts the twins had shown him, Dazai reached the library in record time.

When Dazai reached the library, he beelined straight for the private nook in the back of the library. The place was still very quiet since it was technically dinner time, but Dazai didn’t want to risk being disturbed later. Once he was sure he was alone, Dazai unpacked his bookbag of Mori’s letter.

He took a deep breath and unfolded the freshly sealed Port Mafia stationary. Best not to push this off.

“*Dazai, I’ve missed you!”*

Okay, he was done. Mori had dotted his i’s with hearts.

“*I'm sure everything will work out, whether I tell you the assignment or not. But aren’t things more genuine this way? Just as I’m sure you’ll work out this magic thing eventually. Are you making friends?*

And Dazai—I expect you to train that owl of yours better. It started tearing up all my files the second it flew in through the window! Please train it properly, otherwise I’ll be forced to train it for you.”

Maybe Featherbrain wasn’t so bad, after all. He’d feed it a treat next week as a reward, then kindly describe to it some other ways to mess with Mori that weren’t so obviously his fault.

But... that was it? He'd asked about Father, right? He hadn't just forgotten about that? But Mori hadn't even mentioned the man. Dazai bit his lip and read the letter over again once more.

Hand it to Mori to only write what he wanted to—Dazai got the message. He wouldn't ask again.

With a sigh, Dazai fell back against the chair. Mori was just as annoying in letters as he was in person, really, except now Dazai couldn't even pressure his doctor for more information. He'd just have to wait until Mori was ready to share. Dazai folded the letter and slotted it between two random pages of his potions textbook. He'd look at it again later when it was time to draft his second letter home updating Mori on what he was up to.

Not that it really seemed to matter what he said, anyway. "*You'll work out this magic thing eventually"*— was Mori purposefully trying to annoy him?

Well, he was annoyed.

Dazai had some time to spare before curfew. He glanced around the empty library with two searching eyes. Surely there was something here to distract him from Mori's obnoxious letter. He could go find the twins—they were proving to always have something fun going on—but he'd been bugging them enough lately. He could go sit with Ron and Hermione, but they would just get on his case about being a good, lonely person again and he didn't want to have to deal with that. He could go and annoy Draco, but Pansy was always nearby to stop his teasing from going too far.

Ah—that was it! He'd do Pansy's thing. Blaise had suggested talking to a Hufflepuff about loyalty, and that seemed like just the mindless task Dazai was looking for to get his mind off of Mori's letter.

A part of Dazai actually *preferred* Pansy to Ron and the rest. Her aggression and power-playing were intimately familiar. She refused to help him find his way around the school, though, so maybe the twins still had her beat. Which was a relief, because for all Pansy was *familiar,* Dazai still kind of hated her. She wouldn't *shut up* about blood purity. Trying to manipulate someone like that was like trying to soap-and-lather garbage—you could clean it as much as you liked, but at the end of the day, it was still trash. Familiar but unwelcome. Story of his life.

Still, Dazai didn't really know any Hufflepuffs. He'd have to do something about that.

"Mr. Dazai!" Professor Sprout blinked, folding a pair of gloves over her hands. "I have to admit, of all the students to come to me outside of class, you were not the one I would expect. What can I help you with, dear?"

He smiled, amicable and submissive. “Professor, you’re Head of Hufflepuff, aren’t you?”

“That’s right.” She motioned for Dazai to follow as she began her rounds about the greenhouse. Seeing the plants reach out for Professor Sprout as if asking for food made Dazai’s stomach do a flip. Something thorny and quick received a slap on the vine when it shot out for her arm, and Dazai was almost impressed.

None of the plants reached out for him.

“If this is about the homework you’ve been neglecting to turn in, I’m afraid I don’t take assignments late unless you have a note from the headmaster or matron.”

Dazai watched with a pinched brow as a leaf seemed to *purr* when Sprout pet it. “Ah, that’s not it.”

She didn’t pay him much mind, only turning to him curiously once all of the reaching plants had been attended to. Professor Sprout smiled gently down at Dazai. “Well, what brings you here then?”

He was starting to like Professor Sprout. Maybe unlike a certain obnoxious mafia doctor, she might actually be willing to answer his question.

He smiled emptily. “I was hoping a lovely Hufflepuff like yourself might know how best to show one's loyalty.”

Which was a flowery way of saying *Port Mafia rules don’t apply here, so I can’t just kill Pansy’s enemies as a show of good faith.* Hogwarts was strange like that. Not that he really was loyal to Draco, but he’d get more reading done if those Slytherin punks would stop looking at him like they were just waiting for the signal to smash his head into a wall. Dazai had seen how they all watched at him in the halls—that was a very real threat.

Dazai’s bones were also very breakable. He wasn’t bored enough to go down that route quite so soon.

Also, it might be nice if Draco and Pansy liked him enough to join his gang when he finally got around to starting it.

“Loyalty?” Professor Sprout seemed confused for a second before that warm smile returned once again. “Got into a tiff with your friends, have you?”

“You could say that.”

She nodded and reached out to coax a long tendril of vine into the palm of her hand. The spongey lead seemed to twist and bend within the shadows, but Sprout paid it little mind. “You can’t force loyalty. It’s about patience and care. Your relationship with your friends will grow and adapt from the experiences you’ve lived through.”

Dazai nearly rolled his eyes. “Hypothetically, if there was no relationship...”

And there was more extortion and general menace...

“This Devil’s Snare trusts that I will return every day to water and feed it. I trust it to grow wonderfully in return. We both trust that the sun will rise each and every morning so that we may both continue to flourish.” Professor Sprout smiled serenely. “That is real loyalty, dear.”

What.

Dazai's mouth opened and closed like a fish. That was... that was complete nonsense! Dazai frowned, face scrunching up as he attempted to rationalize what the hell any of that meant.

No. He had to at least try and figure it out, right? Whatever plant analogy nonsense it was, it was *still* more direction than Mori had ever provided him with. Dazai shook his head, hoping to clear up his thoughts.

So... the *plant* was Draco, right? He was... *watering their relationship?* What was the water in this situation, again? Maybe he *should* start doing Draco’s homework for him. Or call someone a mudblood every so often. *Let’s see...* and that made the *plant’s growth...* uh, not having Slytherin as a whole beat the shit out of him? And the *sun* was... it couldn’t be Pansy. *Uh...*

This analogy was kind of falling apart.

“...Thanks?” Dazai’s voice pitched. “I think.”

He *didn’t* think so, actually. What was he supposed to do with this information short of becoming a pure blood supremacist, too?

Professor Sprout nodded, hands spreading out over the Devil’s Snare and skipping along the vines. “As a student, you have much the same relationship with homework, you know.”

Uh oh.

“ You put in the effort to do your homework, and in return I’ll raise your grade.”

“Right.” Dazai said with the look of someone who had never done a homework assignment in his life. “Sure. Ah—I have to go now, look at the time! Well, it was... nice? talking with you, Professor Sprout! Thanks for the advice!”

This conversation had warranted precisely none of these pleasantries.

Sprout raised a brow and pursed her lips in what might have been annoyance, but certainly had a hint of amusement around the edges. It put Dazai a bit at ease, even if her advice had been functionally worthless. He needed to find a better Hufflepuff. Or maybe just give up on this whole endeavor and do things the old-fashioned Port Mafia way.

“Well, off you get then.” She definitely looked amused when she hummed, “And let’s not forget our essay due Monday, Mr. Dazai.”

Out of courtesy, Dazai did write that essay. It was the only homework assignment he'd done all year, and, he hoped, the only assignment he'd do the rest of the year, too. He still wasn't sure how writing an essay on Devil's Snare was going to help him be a better wizard, though.

Chapter End Notes

halloween starts next chapter if i remember correctly

thanks for reading and commenting i really appreciate it

Halloween Morning

Chapter Summary

> Pansy: where are all the house points going????
> Dazai, still not going to the nurse: lmao that's crazy
> Snape, probably: >: (

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Look who it is!"

"Our little information dealer is up early today!"

Dazai blinked up from his book just in time to see Fred and George amble into the Great Hall like they owned the place. They certainly *acted like it*, what with how they sat at the Slytherin table without a care. Sandwiched between the twins, Dazai let his book fall shut.

"Should you two be over here?"

Fred waved him off, snatching an apple off the table and biting into it noisily. "No rule against it."

"Not like that'd stop us."

Well, that much was certainly true. Dazai was starting to think that he might as well break some rules, too. From what he'd seen of Hogwarts, there weren't really any punishments to speak of. He'd been in detention a dozen times now and had yet to be hit even once.

"Anyway," George continued, "Since it's Halloween we wanted our latest prank to be something really fun."

"Got any ideas, Slytherin?"

Dazai hummed. "You should do something on the third floor. I've been wondering what was up there anyway."

Fred and George gave him matching obnoxious looks. "Our little informant doesn't know something? I'm shocked!" Fred whined.

He pouted. "I'll get to it eventually."

"Been busy?"

Dazai rolled his eyes. “Something like that.”

He’d actually kind of forgotten about it. It wasn’t as if Dazai was ever going to figure out how to navigate this school, anyway. Even just *finding* the third floor seemed like a pipe dream at this point. That on top of Draco dragging him around, Pansy’s thing, the detentions... Dazai really had been busy. Just not with schoolwork. His letters with Mori weren’t helping, either. Every letter Featherbrain returned was sketchy at best and dismissive at worst.

“What’s so special about Halloween, anyway?”

The twins stared at him, aghast. Fred’s mouth hung open like he was personally offended. “What’s so special about *Halloween?!”*

“ It’s only the biggest holiday of the year! There’s a whole feast and everything!”

“Streamers and floating pumpkins and better food than usual!”

“It’s the best time for a prank since no one in their right mind would miss the feast.” George nodded, serious. “It needs to be a big prank to match the big occasion. Sure you don’t have any ideas?”

Poison the food was Dazai’s first thought. His second thought was *this feast sounds horrible* and *I want to skip it already.* His third and final thought was *I can’t say either of those things out loud*, so what he answered instead was, “What did you do last year?”

Fred and George shared an exciting look. “Charmed all the floating pumpkins to sing, is what we did.”

“What’s New Pussycat twenty-one times.”

“And one It’s Not Unusual thrown into the mix.”

Dazai winced.

“What a classic!” Fred said, chuckling, “But it won’t do to repeat a prank as good as that.”

George nodded. “Also, Snape said he’d expel us if we did that one again.”

“You two are menaces.”

They were—Dazai didn’t have any prank ideas that he didn’t think they couldn’t top on their own. Obviously, Dazai loved harassing people as much as the next guy, but *pranking* had never been something he’d necessarily... been able to do. After all, he was an eleven-year-old living in the thick of the Port Mafia. The most trouble-making he could get away with was mafia sanctioned. Like breaking traitor fingers or slipping poison into someone's drink when they weren’t looking. And that was all assuming he was let out of his room.

Dazai wasn’t sure how many pranks differed from torture, to be honest. “You could poison something.”

Ah... he said it anyway. Clearly all this practice with self-restraint still needed some work.

The twins shot him matching looks like they were genuinely considering the idea.

“We *could* hide some charmed candies in with the others...”

“Tongue-tying candies and those ones that make you constipated...”

Dazai blinked. “They make candies like that?”

He’d love to slip something like that to Mori.

Fred shook his head. “Nah, but we can make ‘em right quick.”

“Only takes a few charms. We can teach you, if you’d like.”

He opened his mouth to say something along the lines of, *what a horrible waste of time that would be,* but someone else beat him to it.

“Don’t bother,” Draco declared, sauntering into the Great Hall with enough swagger to make the tables and chairs swoon, “He’s awful with magic. Besides, wouldn’t you *blood traitors* be better off pandering to muggles and not my subordinate?”

"Morning, Boss.” Dazai greeted lamely. When he spotted Pansy and Blaise over Draco’s shoulder, he grinned, “Morning, Blaise.”

In true fashion, Blaise only sighed when he saw the trouble Dazai was surely getting up to with the Weasley twins. Though he did raise a brow at Dazai’s untouched plate. Pansy glared a hole straight through his skull, which was still an improvement on her earlier behavior, really.

“Now what have I said about hanging around such filth, Dazai?”

He spared a brief glance to Fred and George who were... actually, they were glaring right back. Dazai wasn’t used to seeing so much vitriol on their faces, for a moment he’d hardly recognized them. Was being called a blood traitor that bad? With the twins posturing at each of his sides, Dazai couldn't help but be put somewhat on edge. Their eyes read nothing but anger.

Dazai tried his level best to project calm. It wasn’t really that hard, since Draco was more of a hobby to Dazai than a person.

“You know I zone out when you talk.” He hummed. “But judging by that look, I’ll say it was ‘*don’t’.”*

For a moment he thought Pansy might reach across the table and strangle him, but the twins spoke up before she could test the boundaries of physical assault.

“We were just leaving.”

“Can’t only be pranking Slytherins,” Fred amended, “Gryffindor’s got to be missing us soon.”

Draco scowled in a way that very much spelled out that he didn’t care.

“That is a great idea though, poisoning the candy.”

Draco’s band of snakes glared down the twins until they’d retreated back to the Gryffindor table. It wasn’t until they’d sat down and started eating breakfast that Draco swiveled on him. “What’s this about poison?”

Dazai shrugged, flipping his book back open to the right page. *Nothing about abilities and magic here, either. “* I don’t know what you’re talking about. Is something poisoned?”

“What that Weasley just said!”

“He’s probably just joking.” Dazai hid his smirk carefully behind listlessness, “Isn’t that their thing, the twins?”

The blonde clearly didn’t believe him, which was all sorts of amusing.

While Pansy silently fumed to herself, Blaise only sighed deeper and started in on his breakfast. Under his breath, the boy grumbled, “Please don’t tease them too much. You know I'm the one who has to deal with them, right?”

“You’re not the subordinate here.”

Blaise raised a brow. “If you ever did anything Draco said, I might give that one to you.”

“Ah, harsh~”

But accurate. Dazai rolled his eyes at Blaise’s sour amusement and look up to see Pansy watching their muted conversation warily. He tried for a pleasant smile in return but was fairly sure it fell somewhere short of *scathing indifference.* “Did you ever solve that mystery of the missing house points, Pansy?”

Her eyes widened like she was surprised he had thought to ask. Then they *narrowed* because it was Dazai asking, which was never a good thing. For a moment, he didn’t think Pansy was going to respond until Draco offered his own curious look to the mix. “Not yet*,”* she grumbled, “We’re going to wind up in last place at this rate. Whoever it is—” Pansy glowered in Dazai’s general direction which was every bit uncalled for as it was accurate, “—clearly doesn’t deserve to stand amongst the loyal, pure-blooded Slytherin elite.”

“How do you know it’s just one person losing the house points?” Blaise asked. “Crabbe and Goyle lost us *at* least ten points just yesterday for their latest bumbling display of incompetence.”

“It’s very consistent. Also I asked Professor Snape.”

“...Ah.”

Pansy huffed, stabbing a fork through her toast. “But he won’t tell me who it is, only that they should ‘hurry up already’ before we’ve got negative points. If that’s even possible.”

I’ll go to the nurse when I’m ready, thanks. Dazai thought, bitterly flipping a page. *And maybe I* want *to see Slytherin lose points. At this point, I’m* basically *a Gryffindor, anyway.*

Speaking of Gryffindor...

Fred and George huddled into each other at the lion’s table, apparently talking so quietly under their breaths that Dazai couldn’t even hear a whisper. Occasionally, they’d shoot identical glares at the Slytherin table.

How... promising?

Dazai rolled the quill between his fingers, careful not to get any ink on his bandages. He’d been mildly successful so far, managing to get just about as much ink on his bindings as he did on the piece of parchment that laid out before him. Dazai would have to change his bandages later tonight—the thought brought a sick feeling to his stomach involuntarily. The paper seemed to stare back with all the intensity of a barely-written letter.

There were really only so many ways to say, “please tell me what you want me to be doing because I don’t think you understand that I’m taking ‘just do whatever’ to mean fail all my classes and start a gang.”

Somehow, Mori still hadn’t gotten that particular message.

“*Mori,”* the letter said. It did not say anything else.

Dazai didn’t have *anything else to say.* He was also getting tired of telling the doctor he did not intend to make friends, despite the fact that he seemed to have done nothing *but* make friends since arriving at Hogwarts. Naturally, Dazai considered these “ friends" to be loyal subordinates and *certainly* not equals, but he was positive Mori would be just as obnoxious either way.

Luckily, Dazai was spared from having to write anymore.

“Oh, Dazai! What are you doing here all alone?”

He looked up just in time to see Hermione approach him, history reference book in hand. She was smiling pleasantly, and Dazai tried not to think too heavily on how his tense spine melted a bit. He folded the letter up and tucked it away to finish tonight. “Ah, I was considering getting some homework done, but since you’re here maybe I’ll just chat instead...”

“No!” She squeaked, “Do your homework, please! Here, I’ll even help!”

Hermione hurried to set her things down onto Dazai's table. She frantically started flipping pages like that would remedy the situation.

"He's just messing with you, 'Mione." Ron interrupted, coming up from behind the bushy-haired girl and taking the seat across the table. "Dazai *never* does his homework. I bet he was planning a prank or something."

"Where did you even come from?"

Ron rolled his eyes. "Unlike *some of us,* I actually want to keep my grade up. Hermione was helping me study."

"Oh, great! You can make sure we both pass potions, then."

Hermione shot them both a reproachful look. Considering Dazai's... *explicit* history with potions, that was probably a fair assessment. Under her breath, Dazai thought he caught her mumbling to Ron, "It might be best, actually, to go over potions again."

Whether that was what she said or not, Dazai couldn't be sure. But Ron nodded fervently with a pale face, so it must have been quite the ordeal. Dazai smirked.

"Anyway, my potions aren't so bad. It's just that Snape doesn't appreciate my creativity and innovation. One of these days he'll let me finish making a potion."

"You mean poison." Ron added, lip curled upwards.

"The only reason he'd let you do something stupid like that is if he wasn't always watching you like a hawk through class."

Dazai chuckled over their concerns. All thought of Mori's letter had almost washed away now that he had a suitable distraction. Maybe life at Hogwarts wasn't so bad. His gang was coming together nicely, after all. He was pretty sure Ron and Hermione might back him up, at least. Well, assuming Ron's rules weren't being violated.

...okay, maybe *Hermione* would join his gang. He still wasn't sure about the twins—they'd seemed pretty upset with Slytherin as a whole that morning, and he couldn't be certain just who all that rage was pointed at. Best not to push just yet. Getting Draco, Blaise, and Pansy to join his gang officially would require a bit of footwork, too.

Dazai came back from his wayward thoughts to see Ron watching him with an absent frown.

"...what?"

"What's with that vacant look?"

He blinked. "Just imagining what our double suicide would look like—"

Ron socked him in the shoulder. Dazai let himself melt onto the table even though it wasn't *that strong* of a punch. He grinned lazily up at the red-head. "So mean~"

“Ugh... *Boys.”*

"Ah, Hermione can punch me too, if she wants.”

Rolling her eyes, Hermione scowled down at Dazai’s slumped figure. “That’s hardly productive. Besides, I think if you don’t want to be hit, you shouldn’t joke about things like that*.”*

Dazai chuckled. “Right, right.”

He stretched and got to his feet, pretending to wince when he moved his shoulder. Ron’s lack of compassion even then made Dazai smile humorlessly. “The Halloween feast starts soon, doesn’t it?”

Hermione blinked at the sudden change in conversation. “I suppose it does.” She shot a forlorn glance at Ron. “I guess we’ll have to stop studying for now. What a shame! And we were almost at the best part, too!”

“There’s a best part of History of Magic!?”

There was not, in fact, a best part of magical history. Dazai would know—he'd read basically every textbook the library had to offer on the subject. Not one of them mentioned what he was looking for, but somehow *all of them* managed to bore him half to death. Hopefully, the next book he picked up would deal the finishing blow on his life. Still, it had been useful. Dazai appreciated not feeling so completely lost about the magical community like he had been before. He could almost feel confident in his knowledge of the magical world.

Dazai packed up his final things and started walking past his friends and out the library. He was all ready to leave without them when Hermione called out, “Wait up! Where are you going?”

“The feast?” He hummed, spinning on his heels.

“I meant *without us.* You can’t just leave in the middle of a conversation!”

“I’m only being courteous .” He looked to Ron, the corners of his lips pulled upward. “Of *someone’s* rules. I won't be at the feast long, anyway. I just wanted to see how Fred and George’s prank went before I head back to the Slytherin common room.”

“I knew it!” Ron jumped like a fire had been set under him. “You *are* up to something with Fred and George!”

Dazai beamed, and didn’t say a word. As he turned to leave, he could distinctly hear Hermione lecturing about how *silly* Rule One was. He also might have heard a “*and don’t shout in the library!* ” which was said just loud enough to be *shushed* by the librarian.

He *might* have heard that, but as a genuine act of kindness, Dazai pretended he hadn’t.

He also *definitely* heard Ron begging to know what the twins had planned. But Dazai thought that was funny, so he pretended he hadn’t.

Chapter End Notes

Dazai: i hope the twins aren't mad at me :(
the twins, about five seconds away from adopting Dazai:

in case anyone is unfamiliar, i stole the twins' prank from last year from John Mulaney. I don't have a single creative bone in me come up with an original prank : / except for in the next chapter when I'm forced to come up with a prank

thanks for reading and commenting

The Feast

Chapter Summary

The real Magic and Mystery is why this fic has so many chapters.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Great Hall was already crowded by the time Dazai arrived, even though the feast itself hadn't started yet. Some of the professors had yet to show up—Dazai noticed Snape and Quirrell among those missing, and wondered when they would get here. The sooner everyone arrived, the sooner Dazai could leave. He really did just want to see what prank the twins had ended up pulling.

Most of the Slytherin table was full, but there was an empty spot beside Blaise. Dazai took it without asking, grinning emptily at the other snake. "Did Blaise save me a seat? How generous!"

Blaise barely reacted to the loud introduction. "It wasn't me who saved you a seat." He hummed, turning from a bowl overflowing with candy to watch Dazai set his things down. "It was Pansy."

"*...Pansy?"* Dazai blinked. A look of vague trepidation rolled over his face. "For *me?"*

That was... ominous. Pansy had shown nothing but contempt for him since Dazai was declared Slytherin, and now she was keeping him close? He tensed up without thinking. Even if he was just playing games, Pansy was serious about this blood purity nonsense. Dazai didn't really peg her as a threat, but he did see a benefit to staying on guard.

Blaise only shrugged, looking somehow both amused and bored at the situation. "She's giving you an ultimatum for this loyalty thing you've been doing... Pansy told me to say that." He yawned. "I think she ran off to find Draco, though."

Dazai blinked. Now that he was looking, neither Pansy nor Draco were at the feast. Granted, it *was* a bit early, but almost everyone else had already filtered in. He could see why—the Great Hall was a colorful mess of pumpkins, streamers, candy, and ghosts. When the food arrived, Dazai thought the place might look even more magnificent. Just like the twins had said, the feast was abuzz with excitement! Dazai shuffled in his seat. He wasn't really a fan.

He shot a quick look at the entrance, then back to Blaise. "Maybe she'll forget about it."

"I thought you were having fun messing with Pansy?"

“I’ve been busy.” Dazai grumbled, wordlessly stealing a taffy from the candy bowl. “Besides, I’m not sure I even want her in my gang. She’s annoying.”

Blaise didn’t say anything for a minute. He stared, silent and rapt, as Dazai unwrapped the taffy and started chewing. He felt No Longer Human flare up, and wondered if Blaise’s intense stare was some sort of curse. Whether that was the case or not, Blaise bit his bottom lip in an expression like he was waiting for something to happen.

“...what?”

“Ah...” the boy started, glancing back to the candy bowl again, “Draco mentioned the candy might be poisoned. He told everyone in Slytherin not to have any.”

Poisoned...?

Oh! The twins’ prank! They’d done what he’d suggested after all, then. Or—at least Malfoy thought they did. But as Dazai ate his taffy, he couldn’t be sure. Even if the candy *was* charmed, it wouldn’t affect him, thanks to No Longer Human. He grinned and took another candy purely due to the fact that no one else in Slytherin would.

Blaise sighed. It was a long and suffering sort of sigh that made Dazai’s grin stretch wider.

“Is that right?” Was what Dazai eventually said. He put a lot of effort into chewing his taffy as obnoxiously as possible, drawing wide eyes from a few nearby Slytherins. He reveled in how the Slytherin table had gone deathly silent as everyone waited in anticipation for him to... explode, or something. Dazai wasn’t really sure just what exactly the twins had actually done—

At the Gryffindor table, Neville ate a butterscotch and his hair turned neon blue.

Huh.

Dazai lifted his hand to inspect it.

With all these eyes on him, Dazai considered having another taffy, even if it would give him a stomach ache—the shock and trepidation on everyone’s faces was distantly amusing. No Longer Human buzzed under his skin when Dazai started picking through the candy bowl for something good. In the end, he decided against another taffy. Although that chocolate bar looked acceptable.

...He was going to be *so* sick tonight. Maybe that’s what he could write in his letter to Mori:

“Dear Mori, I ate too much candy as an act of psychological warfare, then threw up for half-an-hour.”

The doctor would probably hate that, but Dazai was at a loss for what else to write. Also, it might be kind of funny to see what Mori wrote back to that.

He turned to Blaise to see what sort of expression the boy was wearing now, but was met with only something like relief and a vaguely amused frown. Dazai considered telling Blaise

to have some candy, just to see if he would change color too, but decided against it after a minute. All things considered, he kind of liked Blaise.

Tolerated. He tolerated Blaise. Dazai didn't like things.

Okay—he liked chaos. Just a bit. Dazai spun to face his audience.

"Hey, Goyle. You should try one."

"That's Crabbe." Blaise murmured.

"Good Sir," he continued, seamless, "They aren't poisoned, see?" To demonstrate this point, Dazai helped himself to some kind of fruit hard candy. The sting of his ability was almost as sour as the candy itself. "I saw you eyeing that candy earlier—you should have some! Prove to your fellow snakes that it's safe to enjoy themselves tonight!"

Lies, lies, and more lies. Blaise was giving him a curious look, though. Probably trying to figure out how Dazai had avoided being charmed, he thought. But Dazai was having too much fun to bother with that. It helped that he was fairly certain only Blaise and Pansy were clever enough to pick up on his confidence with candy-picking. He tolerated Blaise, so it was fine if he was suspicious, and Pansy wasn't here yet (which was always a good sign, really).

But Crabbe-Goyle (Dazai really could never be sure) wasn't that attentive. He stuck his entire hand into the bowl, coming out with a fistful of candy that made Dazai's stomach flip just to look at. A few stray taffy's fell from his meaty grip and smacked onto the floor. Crabbe-Goyle was half-way through struggling to unwrap a sucker while maintaining his hold on the other candies when Dazai caught site of the twins sitting at their table.

Immediately, Dazai's attention drifted to the Gryffindor table. He was sure Blaise had noticed his sudden lack of enthusiasm at watching Crabbe-Goyle fall for the prank, but the other boy seemed more interested in watching the boy's hair turn purple-and-white striped all over to say anything.

The twins locked eyes with Dazai quickly enough. Dazai wasn't quite sure where he stood with them since that morning, but he raised a hand in greeting anyway. He was pleasantly surprised when they grinned and waved back.

He was less pleasantly surprised by the sound of Crabbe-Goyle screaming at his recent color change right in Dazai's ear. Dazai flinched back from the sound instinctively, and immediately felt his cheeks flush at the involuntary reaction. Without looking the Blaises' way, Dazai mumbled, "I'm going to talk to Fred and George. Please don't let Pansy un-save my seat."

This place was starting to feel a bit too crowded.

Blaise's head whipped around from the new-and-improved Crabbe-or-maybe-Goyle, brows drawn together oddly. He didn't say anything for a moment, then, "Okay."

Dazai willed the flush out of his cheeks—Blaise must have seen him flinch away from the sudden yelling. This was just one of the many reasons he only comes to the Great Hall when it was empty. Damn... he needed to get a hold of himself.

The twins were a welcome distraction. Dazai quickly got to his feet and cut through the crowd directly for them. Fred and George must have seen him approaching, because they rose from their seats to meet him halfway between the Slytherin and Gryffindor tables. They wore matching expression of glee and humor.

“Glad to see you again, little snake.” George said, passively.

Fred nodded enthusiastically. “It’s been *all day,* we were starting to think you’d forgotten about us!”

Dazai blinked. He... hadn’t expected such a warm reception. He bit his tongue—hadn't they been pissed at Slytherin this morning? As a snake himself, Dazai was sure that would apply to him as well.

The twins must have read the expression on his face (all these people around were really throwing him off his game—Dazai was usually much better at concealing his emotions than this). They nodded with a little too much synchronicity for Dazai to entirely discount his telepathy theory.

″I see that Draco isn’t here yet.” George said.

“I do wonder where he’s gotten off to...”

The twins were absolutely beaming. Dazai stared at them blankly for a moment before the pure mischief in those looks dawned on him. Dazai's first thought was, *what have you done?* His second was, “Don’t tell me you killed Draco.”

“We thought about it.” Fred and George said with one voice.

George chuckled, “Nah, we’re public menaces, not public *dangers.”*

″We really pulled out all the tricks for this one—had our good friend Lee Jordan convince him there was a secret elite party on the third floor.”
"He'll spend the whole feast wandering around up there looking for a party that doesn't exist." George nodded, "Or maybe he'll get picked up for a detention, being up there. Good stuff, either way."

Huh. Doing something on the third floor... that had been one of Dazai's suggestions, hadn't it? That and poisoning something, which the twins had clearly taking a liking to. A warm, appreciative feeling tucked itself in Dazai's chest.

“The candy thing wasn’t enough, huh?” Dazai asked instead, fighting to keep the corners of his smile from going lopsided. There was another shout from the Ravenclaw table that made Dazai’s spine snap straight. He barely registered a second-year girl’s hair growing bright yellow polka dots.

For some reason, the twins shared a look at that. Once again, Dazai really wished he could understand their silent communications.

“Well,” one said, “it was two good ideas from an equally good friend.”

“Of course we did both!”

Dazai tried not to focus on how their voices were low and growling when they had spoken. He also tried not to think about how the full room was starting to get overwhelming enough that he couldn’t keep the red out of his face *again*.

At least the twins didn’t press on that particular shortcoming.

“While we’ve got your attention,” George continued, “You should be careful around the candy. I hear some local hooligans charmed most of it.”

“All of it at the Slytherin table,” Fred smirked, “So I hear.”

He chuckled. “I didn’t know there was a charm that could give people stripes and polka-dots.” When Fred and George only shared a silent grin, Dazai continued, “It’s a real shame Draco isn’t here to try any.”

“Try any *what?”*

Dazai whipped his head around to find the source of that particular grating voice.

Standing stiff and wearing an ugly frown, Pansy glared down Dazai. Behind all that hate she was always pointing at Dazai, there was a clear annoyance in her gaze. Dazai guessed she hadn’t been able to find Draco after all—she probably hadn’t even considered that he’d be in the forbidden third floor corridor. When she turned to see that Dazai was talking with the twins, her peeved scowl turned to one of disgust. Dazai could feel Fred and George hovering over his shoulders.

“Candy.” Dazai answered simply. “I hear it’s good. You should try some too, actually—”

Her glower deepened. “Draco told us it was poisoned this morning.”

“Ah, did he? Must have slipped my mind.”

Pansy clearly didn’t believe him, if that glare was anything to go by. But that was fine, since Dazai *was* lying. He kind of wanted to see Pansy lose it over a prank. Not today, he supposed. How disappointing.

He spared a glance over his shoulders to tell the twins that he would be returning to the Slytherin table now that Pansy was here, but the words died in his throat. They were glaring back at Pansy with enough force to leave Dazai reeling. That glare—the anger in it—they weren’t... they weren’t *protecting* him, were they? Posturing, standing up at his sides, scowling at people who dismissed him and called him subordinate...

No, no. That was outlandish. He was a *Slytherin,* after all. And even if he didn't understand it, Dazai knew that house loyalties were very, *very* important to all the other losers at this school. But thinking about how quickly they had acted to retaliate against Draco this morning...

Dazai shook the thought from his head. "The feast is starting. You two should go sit down—I think Neville will want to enjoy his meal in the company of people who know how to fix the particular charm currently turning his hair bright blue."

The twins shot him a skeptical look, but didn't argue the point. George looked from Pansy back to Dazai, before smirking. "Well, can't argue with that."

"Let us know if you ever find Draco." Fred added conspiratorially, "I'm *so* curious where he got off to."

"Sure." He offered a conspiratorial smile.

The twins ran another assessing look between him and Pansy, but they didn't say anything more. They turned and retreated back to their assigned table.

Once Fred and George were out of earshot, Dazai looked back to Pansy, raising a brow in silent question.

"You—"

In many a situation, Dazai would take great pleasure in the fact that Pansy was cut off before she could finish speaking. There was little else better than seeing Pansy snap her mouth shut, the words stolen from off her tongue. However, most of the time this was because a professor had started talking or Draco had found something haughty to say that couldn't wait another five seconds.

Pansy being interrupted by Professor Quirrell barging into the Great Hall and screaming, "Troll in the dungeon!" was not a situation Dazai had experienced to date.

The sheer panic that flooded the room after that, however, Dazai was much more familiar with.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting!! see y'all next saturday!

A Great Show of Loyalty

Chapter Summary

There's a troll in Hogwarts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*Dear Mori, I'm about to do something stupid.*"

Once again, Dazai was intimately grateful that his shitty doctor wasn't at Hogwarts with him. He was certain Mori would hit him over the head and tell him to keep his head down—follow the Slytherin prefects to the library until the troll threat was taken care of.

"*I mean, it's not that stupid,*" he silently drafted the letter in his head, "*But you'd probably still call me suicidal for it.*"

Mori called him suicidal for most things. Like mixing random medicines together and speaking out of turn. Dazai slipped away from the group with all the care of someone who was used to getting in trouble whether they stayed in line or not.

Blaise watched him leave with a silent purse of his lips.

Then the letter would say, "*You told me to make a friend, but Blaise isn't going to tell on me for running off. So this is kind of your fault, isn't it, Doctor?*"

He'd write that if he didn't run into the troll and die. Or a teacher—Dazai wasn't entirely convinced they wouldn't give him a grueling punishment for sneaking off that would leave him wanting to die.

"I'm just going to find Draco. He's a friend too. This really is your fault."

Draco, wandering the third floor aimlessly, surely wouldn't know there was a troll in the dungeons and Dazai, who hated being pushed together with all the other snakes, didn't mind the prospect of death by troll.

Here's the thing: Dazai is used to being countless steps ahead of everything, but since coming to Hogwarts that just hasn't been the case. He's been behind—trying to read up and gather "friends" to even the playing field a bit. Like being thrown into the deep end. Dazai has been laying low, all things considered.

But this troll was sort of a great opportunity to not be so out of his depth, and Draco was a great excuse if he got caught. As Dazai sprinted through the corridors he barely remembered,

he considered how awesome a distraction this troll is for him to finally figure out what was on the third floor.

He had such good ideas sometimes.

"*Dear Mori...*"

...Ah, forget it. Thinking about the Port Mafia at a time like this would just be annoying. Dazai would rather just think about how much more exciting sneaking onto the third floor was going to be.

He sent a silent *thank you* to the twins for letting him trail them around Hogwarts long enough to figure out some of the secret passages.

Dazai was confident they didn't know he was using this information to sneak around when a troll was on the loose, but he wasn't entirely convinced they'd tell him off for it, anyway. Something told him they might like to be involved in all the trouble he was about to get himself into. Unfortunately for the twins, getting in Draco's good graces was subplot A of this little endeavor, so they couldn't tag along even if Dazai was willing to spend the time trying to find them.

So much for self-restraint.

Dazai bounded up the stairs with just the eager he generally reserved for sneaking around. He was pretty sure this was the third floor now. Really, Dazai was the last person to know how to navigate Hogwarts, but this seemed right. He'd certainly never been around here before, and he was sure no one had classes in this hall.

It was silent up here. Everyone else was hiding now.

The hallway seemed to stretch on in that endless way most of Hogwarts did. And despite the fact that most of this floor was out of commission there were still plenty of doors lining the walls. If they weren't teaching any classes up here, what were the professors using all these rooms for..?

Mindlessly, Dazai reached out to try one of the doors, only to find it locked. Luckily, Dazai was adept at lockpicking. After the twentieth time you're locked in handcuffs and dropped him in the dog kennel, one tends to figure these things out. Even as the unpleasant memories washed over him, Dazai forced a smile onto his face. He was proud of this skill no matter where it came from.

It was best to stay in practice, anyway. When he finally went back home...

Well, best not to think about that for now.

After a bit of maneuvering with one of the bobby pins Dazai always carried with him (*just in case!*), the metal lock gave a satisfying *click.*

He slipped the pin back into his coat, then took a careful step towards the now-unlocked door. Just as Dazai was about to pull the handle—

“What are *you* doing up here!? *”*

Dazai startled badly, flinching away from the door. Spine suddenly ramrod straight, Dazai turned to see who had caught him wandering around. Was that a professor? What sort of punishment would they dole out for sneaking around during these circumstances? The fear came without warning. Dazai couldn’t help the way his smile went brittle.

“*Dazai!”*

“Oh, Draco! I was—” He blinked, trying not to feel too relieved once he saw the platinum head of hair pop around the corner, “—looking for you?”

“Don’t make that sound like a question, you no-good subordinate! Where is everyone? I was told there was an elite party up here tonight and *you* can’t have been invited!”

The cold smile on Dazai’s face melted a bit, and he let his hand fall away from where it had been held tightly to his chest. “That totally real party you were going to was canceled on account of the troll. But it looks like you were just wandering around aimless, anyway.” He rambled, “I don’t think Draco even really knew where this party was in the first place. How embarrassing~”

“*Cancelled?* I was starting to think this was all some elaborate prank.” Suddenly, Draco paused. His voice seemed to catch behind his teeth, swirling around like the taught, confused expression in his eyes. “Wait—*troll?”*

“I appreciate your attention to detail, Boss.”

Draco glared. “What troll? There is no troll at Hogwarts! That’d be too dangerous—my father would never allow something like that to happen.”

Dazai quirked a brow. “He must not be trying very hard, then.”

The look he got in return was equal parts seething and panicked. The latter probably more on part of the loose beast Dazai had mention rather than his general disrespect for anything Malfoy. Still, Dazai only grinned lazily.

“Right, right...” He trailed off coyly, “Ah, I’ll just cut to the chase. There’s a troll loose in the castle. I came to warn you, since I’m such a loyal subordinate.”

Draco’s face drained of what little color is already had. “You aren’t serious.”

This brat is kind of gullible, Dazai thought, amused. “You’re welcome to wander down to the dungeons and see for yourself. Or you could sneak back into the library with me. As a fellow truant, I would suggest the latter.”

So much for wandering the third floor. He’d been hoping to find Draco *after* he’d had a chance to figure out what made this corridor so dangerous. Not that it mattered, really, since Dazai could sneak up here whenever he wanted now that he knew how to find the damn place. Between all the *not doing homework* and *getting lost* , he’d surely find the time somewhere .

But the frightened look on Draco's face took precedence, mostly because Dazai was so used to seeing that mouth sneering or scowling. The difference would be more amusing if he wasn't actively in danger of being caught sneaking out at the moment.

"... You pal around with those twins a lot." Draco huffed, all the uncertainty in his voice underlined with vague desperation. "This is just a prank."

He blinked.

Draco was an idiot. It was an almost endearing quality up until the point that the boy would open his mouth. His first words were always some variation of "idiot," and "pure blood" and "stop adding things to the potion, Dazai."

Dazai rolled back on his heels. They should probably hurry up before someone noticed they weren't locked safely in the library with the other Slytherin students. He didn't have time for Draco to suddenly start doubting his honesty.

"Astute observation, Boss. Unfortunately, I was saving my *unleash a beast on the student body* prank for second year." He pouted. "I'm really risking a lot to come warn you, y'know! The least you could do is praise me..."

For a moment, they locked eyes. Draco seemed to be fighting with himself over the prospect of a (fake) party and a troll, but it quickly became apparent that fear won out. Putting on a faux-mocking look, Draco sniffed down at him. "If you're lying and we get caught up here, I'm telling Professor Snape this was your fault."

Draco hurried to bridge the last few steps between them.

"Ah, my boss is so mean! I should just die!"

"As a pure blood—"

Thud.

They shared a look, then—

Thud.

" Eh, Boss, you don't think that was the sound of your totally-real party, do you?"

Draco shot him a glare that quickly flickered and died when another *thud* echoed down the long hall. Dazai suddenly became aware that the corridor was filled with a putrid stench. His nose wrinkled up unconsciously, but that did nothing to stop the reek of unwashed bodies from sticking to his tongue.

"...me neither."

The thudding grew louder— *closer*— a steady *thud thud* like a stumbling walk.

Like something massive walking right towards them.

While Dazai's eyes quickly scanned the far end of the hall looking for whatever could be big enough to make that much noise just by walking, Draco a subtle step closer to his side. Dazai stood up a bit straighter.

It didn't take a genius to guess what kind of creature could make walking sound like an earthquake.

A hand larger than Dazai's entire body wrapped itself around the corner of the wall. The force of this creature pulling itself forward cracked the stone wall. Rubble and stone clattered onto the floor.

Draco tucked himself behind Dazai's body with a squeak. Dazai, too, felt himself tensing up in anticipation.

The smell came first.

From behind the wall, a blue humanoid monster stood at its full height, towering some ten feet over Dazai's head. It had legs thicker than Dazai was tall and a massive wooden club clutched between clawed, meaty fingers. Its small, black eyes found them from across the hall.

Dazai felt himself start to sweat unwittingly. The troll cast a shadow longer than the hallway and plunged the boys into darkness until the only light left was the whites of Draco's eyes. For a moment, they did nothing but stare.

"I thought the troll was in the dungeons." Dazai murmured under his breath.

Draco's fingers clutched into the overlong sleeve of Dazai's cloak, shaking with force and fear. Just as the blonde opened his mouth to suggest something, the troll sprung to life as well.

It let out a raucous bellow that shook the walls and sent a cold shiver down Dazai's spine. There was enough force in that booming voice to rain dust and debris from the ceiling. With a roar, it charged towards them, club bent back like the troll was preparing to beat them over the heads with it.

Dazai's spine was locked in place.

He *couldn't move.*

What good would moving do? He was going to a die a horrible, troll-induced death instead of the lovely suicide he deserved.

Towering over him like a mafioso with a bat, like Mori with a scalpel, like Father with a staff...

A monster standing over him, ready to smash his head in, and all Dazai could think was that it was disgustingly familiar.

The feeling of Draco at his back vanished with the sound of shoes clattering away. Draco ran, leaving Dazai behind in his haste.

And Dazai. Couldn't. Move.

The troll—all twelve feet of massive, fungus-colored beast—reached a meaty paw out around Dazai, encircling him like a doll to be moved around. Dazai stared into its eyes. They were lifeless things. What a sight to be his last. He thought they looked like his own empty eyes. A gross reflection of his own death all this time. Even seconds from his death, Dazai couldn't stop that thought from forming.

The sound of sprinting footsteps. Was Draco running back to help him? There was nothing for him to do.

Dazai made peace with his death as much as he was able. The feeling of a claw around him was going to hurt—

The second the troll's claws cracked around Dazai's back, the world exploded with blue light.

No Longer Human burst to life with a loud scream in Dazai's ears and a burn in the base of his brain. It struggled against him and the weight of a monster bending his bones until the corridor was nothing but the blue of his ability and Draco yelling about something.

It was *all blue* and *all pain* until Dazai's nose started crying blood and the hand wrapped around his waist let his bones breathe again.

The troll dropped to the ground.

Dead.

Draco stopped shouting at exactly the same moment that Dazai felt his lungs reflate.

He took in a deep, shaking breath. Each gasp for air stung, but Dazai swallowed it hungrily. The air tasted of blood.

Dazai took another gasping breath and blinked down at the giant troll's fallen body. It didn't move even when he kicked it.

No Longer Human had killed the troll.

Huh. Dazai thought. Surprisingly, no thought followed it. He was feeling lightheaded. Dizzy.

Whatever had happened when the troll touched him—when it died—No Longer Human had massively overworked itself. The familiar tug of nausea and weariness hung over Dazai's bones, muting his thoughts and filling his head with cotton. It took a minute for him to remember his surroundings.

Slowly, Dazai became aware of Draco manifesting at his side once again. The boy still looked shaken up (Dazai wondered what sort of expression he was wearing—he couldn't really feel his face except for the blood dripping down his chin).

Draco took Dazai's sleeve and gave a pull on the fabric until they were facing one another. In a gasping voice, Draco whispered, "What the *fuck* —okay, *what the fuck, Dazai?"*

Dazai's mouth opened, then snapped shut numbly. It felt like his brain wasn't working right. Was he buffering?

He stared at Draco with what he hoped was a compelling expression, but was probably just as shell-shocked as the other boy's. No Longer Human had just activated with enough force to give him a nosebleed—to shake his brains around. Dazai wasn't confident about his stoic expression at all.

He was going to be sick.

"Right... okay." Draco nodded. There was a pinch to his eyebrows that Dazai couldn't interpret.

Damn, his head hurt.

" Let's get out of here. Before a professor shows up."

Dazai only nodded, finding that he couldn't do much else. Maybe it was shock or maybe it was how loud his ability was ringing in his skull, but Dazai could hardly bring himself to do anything else.

Draco was his boss. The thought came numbly. *He would take care of things.*

Draco tugged on his sleeve, dragging Dazai down and out of the third-floor corridor.

Dazai was scarcely aware that they were jogging more than they were walking. He was only really aware that they had later stopped when Draco started frantically wiping the blood from Dazai's nose with the sleeve he had commandeered.

"Get Blaise." He managed; voice cold in his mouth and his tongue too heavy to life right. "He'll sneak us into the library without the prefects noticing."

Probably provide an alibi, too. Good lad.

Draco nodded and disappeared around the corner. Dazai frowned at the easy compliance... that really wasn't like Draco. *He's probably in shock*. Dazai wondered, lifting his arm to swipe at his nose again. It came away slick with blood, and the words were just as bitter in his mind. Red smeared across his face when he tried to rub it off.

It was barely a minute before Draco reappeared. He hustled Dazai in through a side door to the library with a bit more force than was strictly necessary. Dazai might have snapped at him, but his face was gummed up with blood and his thoughts were too clouded.

They shuffled behind a row of bookcases until they were tucked at the very back of the Slytherin crowd.

Good, they were still here. If the snakes had cleared out from the library, that would mean the troll's body had already been found. *We probably weren't seen.*

" Get the blood off of your face!" Draco hissed under his breath, only looking away from Dazai's frown when Blaise snuck up behind them.

"Can't," Dazai said. His voice slurred oddly, his pounding skull making it difficult to parse things out properly. "Still bleeding."

A thick stream of blood spilled over his parted lips. Dazai couldn't remember any other time when No Longer Human had affected him this badly.

"Oh, that looks bad." Blaise commented, a deep-set frown on his face. "It doesn't look broken. What happened?"

Dazai swirled his tongue in his mouth, pouting. "Draco didn't tell you?"

"He said *'cause a distraction'* then ran off to get you." Blaise hummed. "I told Pansy you were causing trouble and she started screaming about blood purity. Got the prefects' attentions when she started throwing stuff. Seriously—you're bleeding pretty bad."

Draco answered for him. "It's just a bloody nose." Despite the sickly, fearful pallor of his skin, the blonde could look quite serious when he wanted to.

Blaise quirked a brow, not off-put in the slightest. He shot a rather meaningful glance to Dazai (that went entirely ignored), then shrugged. "Alright."

"He came to warn me about the troll even if it was a risk. He's proven himself a trustworthy subordinate—that's all you need to know."

Dazai blinked.

Pansy blanched.

"Dear Mori," the thought came unhindered and unwanted, *"So, funny story..."*

Chapter End Notes

No Longer Human: 1
Magical Creatures: 0

thanks for reading and commenting!! < 3
See y'all next week!

Slytherin Loyalty Club

Chapter Summary

Dazai joins a club that isn't a club.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"We trust him now?" Pansy sneered, trying rather actively to wipe the shocked rage from her face. She flailed. "*Him?"*

" I, for one, completely trust him." Dazai hummed. He kicked his feet up onto the sofa, only to have them knocked off by a bored-looking Blaise.

About half-an-hour after Draco and Dazai had snuck into the library with Blaise's help, Professor Snape had informed them that the lockdown was over—the troll taken care of. Curious wording for something Dazai *knew* the staff hadn't actually done.

He had. Somehow.

The four of them had immediately locked eyes, then not said a word as they trudged down into the dungeons. A silent pact disturbed only by Pansy's glares every few seconds. It wasn't until the Slytherin common room had cleared out that they commandeered the space for themselves and huddled up beside the roaring fireplace.

"You can't vouch for yourself.*"*

" You can if you're not a coward, Blaise."

"Enough." Draco snapped. He ran a hand over his face, looking weary but sure.

Dazai grinned lazily. This time when he tried to rest his legs on the sofa, Blaise only sighed. Victorious, he let his feet sit on the other boy's thighs. "Sure thing, Boss."

Most of Blaise's acquiesce, Dazai thought, was concern. Dazai shuffled under the gaze. Now that his nose had stopped bleeding and his thoughts had cleared up, Dazai found all the worried glances were grating on his nerves. He was fine now—none of that doting was necessary in the slightest.

"He's a *muggle born,* Draco!" Pansy's voice was near a whisper, but it had all the venom of screaming. "There's nothing he *can do* to prove himself loyal to a real wizard!"

Dazai winced at the volume... maybe he wasn't completely fine just yet, then.

“He’s *Slytherin.”*

“ We’re doing what’s best for Slytherin by not trusting him! I still don’t know why you even bother with letting him hang around.”

Something Pansy said must have struck a nerve, because Draco’s mouth locked shut with a snap like his teeth were in protest. Curious. Something to think about later when Dazai's brain wasn’t pounding out of his skull. All this bickering wasn't doing anything for his No Longer Human-induced headache.

Dazai sighed, falling back into the sofa and letting his arm cover his eyes. The light hurt. His sleeve was crusted over with dried blood, so he let it fall back to his side with a pout.

“We ran into the troll.” He said, dry.

Maybe that would shut them up for a while.

Cue: silence.

Even the ambivalent Blaise tensed up underneath him—and Draco, who shouldn’t be surprised at all considering he was literally there. Was he surprised that Dazai had brought it up so casually? It wasn't like that mattered now.

After a moment, Draco cleared his throat.

“He... *did something* to help me run away.” He explained, shooting a pointed glare in Dazai’s direction. “So I trust him. End of discussion.”

“Shit,” Blaise breathed. “Facing down a troll... that’s certainly one way to prove you’re loyal*.”*

From her seat beside the chess set, Dazai saw Pansy’s eyes narrow. He filed that away for later, then turned to grin tiredly at his footrest. “It was pretty cool of me, right?”

“Up until you got a nosebleed, sure.” Draco rolled his eyes.

“You can’t just run from a troll.” Pansy’s frown only deepened. “What did he do, Draco?”

Draco grit his teeth together. He made a beckoning motion with his hands until Pansy crept in a bit closer. Blaise shrugged but didn’t move. Possibly due in part to the fact that Dazai was using him as a footrest.

Draco held himself tense. “You don’t tell anyone what I’m about to say, alright? Consider it a Slytherin secret of the highest order.”

Blaise raised a brow. “Any particular reason why?”

“*Blaise.”*

The other boy blinked—was that a hint of bewilderment on the usually apathetic Blaise's face Dazai saw there? Even Dazai, who already knew exactly what Draco was going to say felt himself tense up with the serious frown on his Boss' face. He always did like dramatics.

Blaise raised his hands in something like acquiescence.

What Dazai didn't like was these Slytherin punks knowing that he could nullify a troll to death before he even knew exactly why that had happened. He wasn't averse to the idea so much as uncertain of it. Dazai was confident he could trust Blaise, but he kind of hated Pansy and Draco. Although that was less a matter of *trust* than of *taste.* As it was, his lack of knowledge on the subject was turning Dazai's stomach inside out. Or maybe that was the lingering anxiety of a near-death experience. Who could say, really?

"Like the valiant Slytherin I am, I killed the troll with a frankly impressive display of magic for someone who failed a practical yesterday. I'm like a knight! Hey, Boss, can you knight me?" Dazai traced a vague shape in the air. "Or, y'know, something like that."

Pansy rolled her eyes, turning to Draco with that persistent scowl etched into her features. "Right. Draco? What actually happened?"

Draco let out a long, suffering sigh before pinching the bridge of his nose. "Dazai killed the troll."

"You're joking."

" I would *love* to say that he's lying. You think I want to live with the knowledge that a muggleborn killed a troll when all I could do was run?!"

"And saved your life." Dazai piped up cheerily. Without saying a word, Blaise smacked his leg in a way that must have meant *learn when to shut up,* because at this point he must have known Dazai wasn't going to stop using him to rest his feet.

Dazai turned his attention from pouting at Blaise back to Pansy and Draco just in time to hear Draco argue, "It must have been accidental magic. You know he can't even manage the levitation charm! Yet *somehow* he magicked it dead!"

Pansy stared him down in clear disbelief. "*Right* ." The '*that obviously didn't happen'* was mostly unspoken. Draco must have heard it anyway with how he tensed up and cautiously glanced in Dazai's direction.

Taking pity on Draco, Dazai blinked lazily to his footrest. "Blaise, you seem very calm about all this."

"I mean." He shrugged. "I was starting to think you didn't even have magic. Accidentally spelling a troll to death is kind of a relief, to be honest."

"You *believe* this nonsense?!" Pansy practically shrieked. She was quickly *shushed* by Draco, but she started speaking again (quieter now, thankfully) almost immediately. "You know I

trust you, Draco. But he's... he's bad news! You *know* he doesn't belong in Slytherin! How do you know it wasn't your magic that... that killed the troll?"

Dazai groaned silently into his sleeve when a spike of pain lanced through his head. *Goodness, couldn't they fight over him tomorrow?*

The No Longer Human-induced headache had only ramped up throughout the evening—now an ever-present spike drilling slowly through his brain. He looked for something throwable to get everyone's attention (by smacking Pansy in the face, probably), but gave up after a few seconds of looking. Instead, he interrupted Draco mid-sentence.

"You keep saying I'm not a real Slytherin*."* He commented tiredly. "But if I wasn't sorted in Slytherin I would never have gone up to save Draco."

For a second, the others only blinked at him emptily.

Pansy's eyes narrowed. "Because you're *not* a real Slytherin."

"Maybe not by traditional means." Blaise shrugged, seeming to pick up on Dazai's train of thought easily enough. "But maybe he was sorted for a different reason."

"Like being an awesome subordinate. Or saving your life. Or losing all of our house points."

"That was *you?!"*

Dazai continued right over Pansy's exclamation. "You keep fighting about it, but if it weren't for *me* Draco would be dead right now." Dazai melted further into the sofa until most of his weight was either pressed into the corner of a cushion or pushed onto Blaise's' lap. "Ah, does that make me more loyal than Pansy? Since she hasn't actually done anything to help."

"*What?!"*

Snorting, Blaise quirked a brow. "I wouldn't go quite that far. But he does have a point. Do you know how powerful someone has got to be to just accidentally kill a troll?" He continued instead. "For someone we consistently write off as not being a true Slytherin*,* he's done a lot to support us snakes."

"That is true." Draco muttered. One could almost see the gears turning in his brain if they were looking close enough. He drew himself together. "He saved my life. I'm not going to bully him out of Slytherin." Draco turned to Pansy. His brows were drawn together in something like serious contemplation. "Pansy, that goes for you, too. I know you two have some... *thing.* But that stops now."

Blaise hummed, speaking over Pansy's offended squeak. "You know, we talked a lot that first day about training him*,* but we never really did." He paused. "Maybe it's time to actually do something about that. Now that he's showing signs of having some pretty potent magic, after all."

Magic*, right...* Though now that Dazai considered it, working under the guise of using accidental magic, rather than an ability, would probably work out in his favor in the long run.

At least until he could finally find the books he had been looking for.

“ You’re...” Pansy’s lip quirked. “You can’t be serious. He’s a *muggleborn,* Blaise!”

“Kind of like a Slytherin mascot.” Blaise pointedly ignored the exaggerated annoyance blossoming on Dazai’s face to add, “or a pet that’s useful every once and a while.”

“I think I preferred it when Draco was content with the troll thing. Let’s backtrack on this pet nonsense. Remember when I was a hero a few hours ago? That was cool.”

Draco nodded in a way that suggested this was all very much his idea, even though all he’d actually contributed was “*I know we were planning on bullying Dazai, but hear me out.”*

“He’s still my subordinate, obviously. Today was an improvement*,* sure, but he’s still not up to pure wizard standards. But no more threats.” The blonde shot a look to Pansy. Draco’s voice was even and certain—lilting on that sense of childish importance Dazai found so irritating. “He’s a Slytherin now. For real. Clearly regular classes aren’t doing him any good. He’s proven himself loyal to Slytherin—now let’s make him useful to us!" He paused. There was something strangely serious in his tone. Almost proud. It drew Dazai's brows together in concentration. "And none of this leaves our group, got it?”

“Ah,” Dazai blinked a few times to clear his vision, expression a bit stunned mostly by reflex. “I’m in your care, then. Please treat me kindly.”

“Hear, hear.” Blaise answered listlessly.

Pansy glared, but after a moment her expression seemed to melt into a passive bitterness. “...Fine.”

Huh.

Professor Sprout’s lecture had been worthless after all. It was good to know that the Port Mafia method of loyalty “do something vaguely threatening” won out over all that plant analogy nonsense in the end.

At least he wasn’t the plant in this situation.

“This is adorable. We’ve got our own little club!” Dazai cheered. “A little Slytherin club for trust and loyalty and whatever. I nominate Blaise as club president.”

“No.”

“Okay, but I don’t like Pansy and Boss shouldn’t be bothered with something so tedious. Since that leaves only *me—”*

Draco tossed a chess piece at him, but Dazai only let it smack him in the stomach and fall to the floor. *“* There is no Loyalty Club. Are you sure you don’t have brain damage? *”*

“ That *was* a lot of blood. Maybe you should see Madam Pomfrey.”

“Don’t be so boring.” Dazai yawned, “I just need to sleep, then I’ll be back to my charming self tomorrow morning. Is the club meeting adjourned?”

Draco threw another pawn at him. “It’s not a club, Dazai!”

“Good morning, Loyalty Club.”

“Dazai, I swear on Merlin’s beard—”

Blaise handed him a bagel. “Are you feeling any better?”

“I want to die.” He replied, smiling while he dropped the offered bagel onto Pansy’s plate without taking a bite. “So about normal, I guess.”

“Good. I think.”

Pansy rolled her eyes, but uncrossed her arms long enough to spread jam over the bagel anyway. “Accidentally kill any more trolls last night?”

“How are you mad about that?”

“No bickering.” Draco interrupted with a sigh, trying (and generally failing) to look inconspicuous. He whispered, “We’re meeting out near the Forbidden Forest for your first magic lesson. Be there on time for once in your life, will you?”

“I will absolutely get lost, Boss.”

Blaise sighed, but Dazai thought it sounded amused around the edges. “I’ll make sure he gets there.”

“Good.” Draco made a proud sound. “By the end of first year, you’ll be the proper image of a Slytherin student. Don’t let me down, subordinate!”

“Ah, why do I regret this already?”

“*Mori,*

You might be getting a letter in the mail soon about the suspicious death of a troll. I wouldn’t worry about it so much... But in case you did get a letter like that, I’ve attached a list of

potential reasons you could reply with for why it definitely wasn't me who killed that troll. Since you told me to make friends, this whole situation is kind of your fault.

On a related note, No Longer Human can kill magical creatures. I'm still looking into it. There's something strange about everything that happened last night, but asking you about it won't get me very far, right?

If you ever deign to tell me the purpose of this mission, feel free. Otherwise, I have a class to get to.

I've told the owl to hide something dead in your office. Good luck finding it.

Dazai."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and commenting! Yall are lovely,,,

See y'all next week!!

Dazai Absolutely Gets Lost

Chapter Summary

A Hermione-based intermission chapter before we get back into some shenanigans.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All day, Dazai had been on edge. He wasn't stressed or worried or anything like that— *no,* he was on edge because the *teachers* were on edge.

It wasn't five minutes into his first lecture of the day when Dazai noticed Professor Flitwick's eyes scanning the students like he was hunting something down. It took a moment with how that headache was still pounding on in the back of his skull, but eventually Dazai realized: *they were worried.*

As far as the staff knew, someone unknown had killed the troll and it wasn't one of them. There was little more dangerous than someone powerful sneaking under your nose undetected.

Judging by the way Professor McGonagall stalked the halls and how Professor Snape glared with more force than usual, they still didn't know. But they wanted to. It was odd—even Professor Quirrell was extra vigilant. Quirrell, who was always stuttering and floundering looked him dead in the eyes as he entered the Dark Arts class. Searching through each student.

Searching for him.

Dazai sighed. His headache still screaming, the pressure of his professors, the looming knowledge of Draco's "lesson" today... he'd much rather just die. But at the same time, he *was* interested to learn about the troll and about his ability. Pinching the bridge of his nose, Dazai let his thoughts mute and mumble until there was nothing more than static bouncing around behind his eyes. One thing at a time.

The Loyalty Club's latest endeavors to indoctrinate him into Slytherin ideals were going to include magic training. Which was going to be disastrous, but maybe a little funny. Dazai wasn't sure what Draco thought they were going to get out of this whole thing. But if he knew one thing, it was that Draco liked to subordinate others. Couldn't get much more under someone's thumb than being their student.

Or pet. Really depended on who you asked.

But really, this was just another test of loyalty in a long line of them. Saving Draco's life was a good step, but it would never be enough. He'd always just be "the muggleborn" to them—which was fine. Dazai didn't care. He did find it amusing, though, that his "magic" show last night shocked the Slytherin gang enough for them to realize, *hey, maybe let's not just let him run around doing whatever.*

If this had been the mafia, he'd have ground someone like that beneath his heel by now. Sneaking out—even if he had killed the troll and saved Draco—would put a stain on the Slytherin name. You don't damage the Port Mafia's good name and walk away with all your limbs intact.

"Dazai? Are you sleeping with your eyes open again?"

He blinked. "Hm?"

Hermione frowned down at him, somehow managing to look annoyed and concerned at the same time. "Class is over." She glanced over to his notes. "You know, you're going to fail if you don't start writing things down. And you'll never be able to start a successful career if you don't pass your classes now."

With a hum, Dazai started to gather his things up. His brain thrummed painfully at the movement, but he tried not to let that show in the pinch of his brows. "I've already got a job lined up."

"What, *already?* You're eleven*!* Oh dear, am I falling behind?"

"It's a family business."

With all of his supplies in his bag, Dazai got to his feet. As they started to leave the classroom side-by-side, she asked, "Oh? What do your parents do?"

His nose scrunched up. What was the best way to explain the mafia without describing all of the backhanded deals and assassination they did..? After a pause, he finally settled on, "Mori is a doctor. Private practice." As an (indulgent) after thought, he added, "I'll take over the business when he finally croaks."

Well, something like that.

Hermione gasped. "Dazai! You *really* shouldn't say things like that. I'm sure your... dad? Cares a lot for you!"

Dazai shrugged. "What do your folks do for a living, then?" Not mafia work, obviously. Hermione didn't really have that dangerous air about her like he and Quirrell did. Though he still hadn't given up on the possibility of a wizarding mafia.

"Oh! Both of my parents are dentists. Which is why grades are so important—when I *do* figure out what I want to do when I'm older, there won't be a single opportunity I can't reach!" She spared him a curious glance. "Is that not the case with being a doctor? I'd think

you would care a lot about grades if you were planning to do something like that. Especially with how you'll have to go to medical school..."

"Ah, Hermione's so mean! Aren't you ever tired of making fun of my poor grades?"

While Hermione immediately started trying to backtrack, Dazai felt a shiver roll up his spine. There was a chill to the air now that Halloween had passed, and it made the dungeons even more unbearable than before. But with the troll fiasco forced him down there more than he'd like. Now wasn't the time to wander and risk looking abnormal. Not until he figured out exactly what No Longer Human nullifying a troll meant. And *certainly* not until he knew why the troll was there in the first place. Speaking of...

"Hey."

Hermione startled out of her ramblings; lips downturned in obvious displeasure at being interrupted.

"How do you think the troll got in Hogwarts last night?"

"It must have wandered in from the cold, right?" She hummed, thoughtful. "Or maybe it was drawn in by all the magic we were using to decorate."

Dazai blinked. That was an interesting hypothesis. "Ah... Why would that be, by chance?"

Leading him up the stairs, Hermione beamed. She was always eager to talk about something she had learned, Dazai knew. It would have been an endearing quality, but Dazai couldn't get over the fact that she read for pleasure and not for information so she could manipulate people later. Some people were just of different strokes, he reasoned.

"Well, trolls are magical creatures, aren't they? I read about it just this morning in light of what happened. Most magical creatures need to feed off of the latent magic in the air or they'll die. I imagine this particular troll smelled a feast and thought to invite himself!"

That... was exactly what he was looking for! If a troll needed magic to survive, then touching Dazai would have nullified what was essentially it's lifeblood. What other creatures worked on that principle? If he was a betting man (he was), he'd say goblins and ghosts probably worked on the same system. Dazai could easily recall his earlier experiences with both of those creatures. They had both gone out of their way to avoid touching him, hadn't they?

Dazai felt a grin slip onto his face as his satisfaction began to match Hermione's obvious eagerness. "I don't know why we don't talk more. You're the most helpful person here."

"Oh, well." She flushed. "Thank you."

"Always, my lady." Dazai couldn't help but snort when Hermione's face bloomed an even deeper shade of crimson.

Guess his library readings would be moving off of history and onto magical creatures. Dazai was going to wear a hole in his seat at the library if he kept finding interesting things to read like this. Still... it was almost nice to have something like that to keep him busy. He always

preferred feeling overwhelmed to feeling listless. There was plenty of lying around and doing nothing back home.

Dazai scratch at his wrist, frowning at the uncomfortable thought.

Abruptly, Dazai stopped dead in his tracks. Hermione startled and turned back to face him after a second when she realized he was no longer following. Her lips quirked into a curious frown.

“What’s wrong? Did you forget something in the classroom?”

Shaking his head, Dazai quickly assured her, “No, no. That’s not it.”

“Well then—”

“I’m lost.”

Hermione’s face went blank for a second before being quickly replaced by a look of mortal confusion. “You’re *lost*? You’re following me, how are you lost?!”

“I mean,” he said, glancing around the hallway. It was a long corridor (like any other part of the school, really) lined with doors, moving paintings, and sets of armor. His explorations with the twins had certainly helped him to understand the layout of Hogwarts, but only with places he actually *wanted to go to.* Like class and the third-floor corridor, apparently. If Dazai had seen this particular hall before, he’d wiped it from memory until it was just a blur amongst the other identical, winding hallways. “Where are we going? What’s even over here?”

She sighed fondly. “Only you could get lost when following a guide, Dazai. And there are quite a few things this way. The Gryffindor common rooms, for one—*oh,* we won’t be going there. I don’t think I’ll be able to let you in given your being a Slytherin and all. There’s another door to the library, too. That’s where I was headed, actually.” Almost reluctantly, she added, “You haven’t got to come if you’d rather not. Although I was hoping to discuss the various applications of aconite in potion brewing—”

“Isn’t that our essay homework for potions? Are you trying to cheat off of me? And here I thought Hermione was the moral one!” He tutted.

Hermione squeaked. “I *always* follow the rules! I was hoping *you* would take the initiative and actually do your homework.”

“I’ve done my homework! Once.”

Not that it had been worth it. Professor Sprout’s lesson in loyalty had been functionally useless. If he’d known all he needed to do was kill a troll to get in Draco’s good books (and Pansy’s one-step-above-bad books) he’d have just done that instead. All that plant nonsense was just a huge waste of his time.

“Just once isn’t enough to pass! Aren’t you worried about final exams?”

Dazai shrugged, swaying on his feet a little.

He'd heard from Fred and George that most of the final exams were practical—showing off the magic Dazai was genuinely incapable of doing. Funnily enough, the mafioso was fairly certain he'd be flunking out at the end of the year. He'd probably have some suspicious professors on him asking how he'd even been enrolled, too. Something told Dazai Hermione wouldn't buy that.

"Everything passes." He said instead, somewhat serious mostly by mistake, "Anyway, I can't come to the library with you. Draco and co. are starting a club. I should probably show up."

Especially considering the club was literally made around him being entirely useless with magic. If anything, he was at least curious to see whatever lesson they had concocted—it couldn't be any worse than the "lessons" he had back home.

The though lead Dazai's mind astray, such that when he blinked back to attention, he wasn't sure why Hermione's brows were pinched together in concern. "Sorry, did you say something?"

She sighed. "I *said:* are you safe, going off with them? I know you mentioned they were bullying you... I'm certain Professor McGonagall would help if you told her!"

Dazai contemplated saying, "it's not that bad," or "I can manage," or even some variation of, "if they were a real problem, I'd have killed them by now" but none of those seemed appropriate for a supposedly victimized schoolboy to say. Instead, he smiled sheepishly and wore that warm and soft persona to the ground. "Is Hermione so concerned about me? Have you fallen in love with me? I'm afraid I only accept potential suicidals for that sort of relationship."

Well, almost warm and soft. Dazai would blame it on the headache.

"*Dazai!"* She shrieked, flushing redder than a ripely picked apple, "I'm concerned as a friend*,* not a— a *—!!"*

Plastering a wide smile onto his face, Dazai let himself chuckle. "You're too easy to tease. I read a really nice book the other day called *How Not to Fall for Stupid Pranks.* You should study that instead of potions!"

She looked skeptical, but the blush on her face made it hard to discern. She was right to be skeptical, of course, considering Dazai wasn't even sure such a book existed. In the end, Hermione didn't rise to the bait except to give him a suitably scolding look. She sighed.

"I really am concerned, you know?"

"I know." Dazai shrugged, eyes squinting through a piercing headache. "Walk me to the library? I really haven't got a clue where we are."

Hermione sighed indulgently. "Do you want to write this down?"

“I have arrived!”

Draco shot to his feet, sending a few bright red leaves into the air with a furious crinkle. Beside him, Pansy was much more graceful in standing up—which is to say about as graceful as a rabid dog. Blaise didn’t even move.

“Where have youbeen ?!” Draco shouted, flailing his arms around, “Our club was supposed to meet thirty minutes ago! Oh, Merlin, now you’ve got me saying it.”

“Oh.” He answered blankly. “I got lost.”

The blonde’s mouth dropped open like he might have been struggling to find adequately reprimanding words. In the end, the shit-eating grin Dazai wore must have turned him off, because Draco whirled on someone else instead. “Blaise! Weren’t you going to make sure he didn’t get lost again!?”

“I’m not his babysitter. Do it yourself.”

“This was your idea!”

When Blaise only shrugged and turned the page in his Transfiguration textbook with an aura that exuded apathy, Dazai piped up, “I saved your life, cut me some slack.”

“I know that. And now we’re going to train you to do that again. But on command this time.”

“You’re welcome to try, but I have a track record of ignoring people who tell me what to do. I mean, Professor Snape has been bugging me to go to the nurse for ages now and I’m still not even sure where that place is.”

“Just,” he flicked Dazai on the arm, “put some effort into being a good *subservient* snake, will you? You’ve proven you’re trustworthy, but you still aren’t very useful.”

“Your bullying is as on-point as ever, Boss.”

“Good.” Draco preened. “Today you’ll be practicing the levitation spell. Even a *child* could do that one."

Chapter End Notes

> He actually gets to practice with his club next chapter, promise. Also! Dazai's nurse visit is happening pretty soon, so that's fun.

thanks for reading and commenting!! Very much appreciated, as always. Next update Saturday!

Blowback

Chapter Summary

Everything is going great.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai looked up from his wand just in time to see Draco give up completely. It was a good look for him, and Dazai much preferred it to the look of general disdain the boy normally wore.

“I feel like we’ve made some good progress. Want to call it a night, Boss?”

“It’s been *a week.* How have you not even managed a spark of magic yet?”

“Good question.” Dazai replied fluidly, “I could tell you, but then I’d have to kill you.”

Blaise glanced up from his book. “Well, last time Dazai did magic, he was in mortal peril.”

Dazai blinked over to Blaise, who was sitting in the grass with his back pressed up against a tree. He had a book open in his hands and a spread of quills and papers around him. Evidentally, one week of Dazai failing magic repeatedly was too much of a hassle. At some point along the way, "Training Time" had become Blaise's "Homework Time" and Draco's "Yell at Dazai Time."

Every hour of the day was always "Hate Dazai" time for Pansy, so nothing new there.

A strong gust of wind blew through their training clearing. Blaise's essay flapped loudly against it. The tiny rock weighing it down rolled.

Ah... did Blaise realize his essay was about to blow away? If it flew into the Forbidden Forest, he wasn’t going to be able to get that back.

“Now that’s a great place to start next lesson. Mortal peril!” Pansy cheered from over Draco’s shoulder. “I can fire different spells at him and see what happens!”

“No.” Draco and Blaise said together.

With a sigh, Blaise finally set his book down. Beside him, his essay continued to kicked against the wind. “I don’t know why you think he’s going to learn anything if a quarter of the year hasn’t taught him any magic yet. Are we absolutely sure it wasn’t just a fluke he killed the troll?”

“I know the professors have all but given up on him, but I’m sure with my expert tutelage Dazai will get it right soon... er—eventually. After all, I’ve had elite tutors since long before coming to Hogwarts. I’m sure I’ll be able to teach him *something.* ” He frowned, looking momentarily quite thoughtful. “And fluke or not, even accidental magic can’t kill a mountain troll unless the wizard was crazy powerful.”

“I’d like to return to my ‘mortal peril’ plan, actually.”

Dazai beamed, pointing his useless wand in Pansy's direction. Clearly knowing it wouldn't do anything, Pansy didn't even flinch as the spell-casting weapon was shoved in her face.

“I second that plan.” He said. Like most things in Dazai’s miserable existence, the best- and worst-case outcome for Pansy’s proposal were the same thing: he died. Blaise shot down the idea with little more than an eyebrow raise. Feeling petty, Dazai silently willed the boy’s DADA essay to take flight.

It didn’t. *Yet* .

They’d been at these Loyalty Club “let’s make Dazai good at magic” meetings for seven days now to no avail. Dazai still wasn’t sure how to feel about the whole thing. Obviously, it was a fruitless endeavor, considering No Longer Human prevented him from using magic. Another thing was that it was sucking up all of his free time. Instead of researching abilities, magic, and magical creatures, he was stuck waving a stick around in a field. Not to mention that his naseau and headache still hadn't completely faded. Running around outside all day was only making him feel worse. But... somehow Dazai didn’t absolutely hate it. It was a weird feeling—one he was completely unfamiliar with.

He almost... *enjoyed* hanging out with these losers?

Ugh. His head pounded sharper in repulsion. This whole *feeling thing* was disgusting, so Dazai was mostly choosing to focus on the negatives here: no free time, waving a stick around, etcetera. Speaking of—

Dazai gave his wand another cursory flick, muttering, “*Wingardium Leviosa"* mechanically. The spell was practically burnt into his tongue with how many times he had uttered it over the last few days. When nothing happened, he turned back to see Draco and Pansy bickering. Dazai pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Weowe it to him to at least make him functional .*”* Draco hissed, “He saved my life.”

Pansy quickly countered, “He saved the life of his better*,* entirely by accident*.”*

“Well, she’s not wrong.” Dazai said, clapping his hands together.

“Keep practicing.”

“Yes, yes.”

Another wave of the wand here, another chanted spell there... Dazai felt a bit like he was conducting an orchestra. Blaise's essay flapped and flutter in the wind like raccous applause.

Blaise watched him for a moment before returning to his Defense Against the Dark Arts textbook.

Dazai had read that book front to back already, if only just to understand his potential enemies better. Nothing in there could possibly help him, but it was interesting to see how wizards had operationalized magic. As far as Dazai could tell, wizards were manipulating something latent in the air that Dazai, just by existing, erased. It was fruitless research, really, but he felt at ease knowing he could render these wizards useless with a single touch.

"*Wingardium*... ah, what was it again?"

"*Leviosa.*" Blaise replied, languidly turning a page. "You know what it is."

"...maybe."

Dazai rubbed at his eyes after attempting to cast another time. He hadn't quite gained his energy back since killing the mountain troll on Halloween. Whatever he'd done to that thing must have overworked No Longer Human and left him feeling the effects all week. His headache had only gotten worse, too. And with Mori's reply about Halloween coming in tomorrow, Dazai had been unwittingly quite unwell. He couldn't help but fear the worst. Even with Mori miles and miles away, Dazai shivered in sick anticipation.

Standing around next to a dangerous forest and pretending he had magic with a group of delinquents Dazai tolerated at best was a good distraction.

"See? He's not even trying."

Dazai blinked out of his thoughts in time to see Draco turning to him at Pansy's accusation. "Quit zoning out!"

He only waved his blackthorn wand in answer. Blaise's paper flapped in the wind, Pansy rolled her eyes, and Dazai didn't do magic. Same old same old.

What *was* different was the faint buzzing in the back of Dazai's head. It was the familiar sting of No Longer Human upset by the magic surrounding the castle and further compounded by how overworked it was. But there was something else as well... something fuzzy tinting the edges of his vision black.

Something fuzzy like this:

Dazai flicked his wand and muttered the spell just right, then promptly passed out. His vision swam, turning the flat line of trees to his left into a crashing wave of foliage. There was an obnoxious high-pitched tone coming from the base of Dazai's skull—loud enough that it was all he could hear, even when Draco's mouth still had the appearance of opening in speech. What were he and Pansy talking about again? Dazai couldn't tell for how dizzy everything had suddenly become. Even his thoughts were blanking out. Then, without warning, he smacked into the dirt like a sack of flour sent atumble.

The last thing he saw before the whole world turned black was Blaise's essay flying south into the Forbidden Forest. Dazai tried not to feel too pleased with that, but with how quickly he blacked out, it's a wonder that he felt anything at all.

There was blood on his small hands that didn't feel out of place, though he couldn't tell what was bleeding with how shadowed the world was. It was dark—the room was oppressively dark. Something quiet and murmuring in his brain that he should be thankful it was far too dark to see.

He reached out with quaking baby-fat fingers to find the source of blood, but instead a larger hand wrapped around his own. A hand calloused and unkind. It must have been Father's. Dazai's hand was a landscape of black and blue while Father's was the blade ready to turn him into a jigsaw puzzle. He'd never done a puzzle with a picture before.

But where was the blood coming from? The tang of color in the air, the stain of red in his skull, the picture frame closing him in—

Oh. He's dreaming.

When did he fall asleep?

Dazai felt a sort of guilty relief when the hand holding his turned to smoke. The midnight room vanished into something more vague and pointless. Less of a dream and more of a thought, now. His heart pounded noisily around his skull—an echoing thing like drums. Was he afraid? He didn't feel very afraid, but his chest was tight and aching with unshed tears.

His dreams were always too vague, but the dread was very, very real.

(The blood on his hands was, too.)

Dazai woke up.

Dazai had blacked out many times throughout the duration of his first eleven years of life, usually from blood loss. Because of this, he was intimately familiar with the sensations of waking being the following:

The beeping of a heart monitor, the sting of fresh wounds, the patronizing chattering of one Doctor Mori Ougai.

Not one of these things was present now, however, such that Dazai wasn't entirely sure he'd actually woken up. If sleep begged to take over, Dazai wouldn't bother to fight it. He always *did* prefer dreamless slumber to waking. But something was different this time. Was is the press of a thin cotton blanket tucked over his arms like a tight coffin? Or maybe it was something like—

"Hmm..."

That. A voice he didn't recognize in the slightest. The foreign voice was warm in tone and gentle like water falling over stones. Around the corners of every word, there was a touch of agedness to the sound. Dazai felt himself melt into the voice almost accidentally. The hum was quickly followed by the sound of clicking heels and more thoughtful breaths.

"...I see. You four simply *must* be more careful when practicing magic. Make sure everyone is feeling well before doing anything outside of teacher supervision."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Oh—he recognized those voices, though. Draco, Blaise, even the reluctant grunt of Pansy... Everyone in the Slytherin faction of Dazai's gang was here.

"Now," the mysterious voice continued, suddenly edged with quiet stubborn, "All of you: get out."

Dazai, eyes resolutely shut, took great pleasure in imagining the affronted look that must have accompanied the rich-boy gasp Draco emitted. He almost opened his eyes just to see, but felt the allure of pretending to be asleep more profitable. After all, Dazai still wasn't quite sure *where* he was—or really *why*, for that matter.

"He won't get any better with you lot standing around. Out, out! He needs his rest now!"

Behind the shuffle of the Loyalty Club (sans Dazai) shuffling resignedly out of the room, Dazai put himself to dissecting everything that had just happened. The sound of a door clicking shut told Dazai it was just him and the stranger left, now.

Dazai read the black of his eyelids for answers. He had passed out—*why* was an entirely separate mystery. No Longer Human had been acting funny since Halloween, but that shouldn't have been enough to knock him out a week after the incident. Something else must have been at play. But what?

Dazai squeezed his eyes shut, trying for force a realization. When none came, he shifted his attention onto a currently more pressing matter.

Where was he?

Dazai rolled the facts through his mind: he had passed out. Draco and co. had brought him here. They felt comfortable enough to leave their sick friend here, unsupervised.

And that meant...

Was he finally at the infirmary like Snape had instructed?

Dazai's rust-colored eyes popped open with all the intention of fox locking onto its prey. The owner of that sunbaked voice was an older-looking woman with a wrinkled, thoughtful smile pursing her lips together. She had curly grey locks of hair peeking out from behind the white cloth over her head and thin bluer-than-blue eyes. Looking around the room at all the corked potions and equipment... this must be the Madam Pomfrey lady Professor Snape had been talking about!

Guess Slytherin would end it's "losing five points every day" streak.

Damn—Dazai had been hoping to keep that up a bit longer. At least until Pansy snapped and finally tried to strangle him to death. And he'd been so close too...

Involuntarily, Dazai let out a little groan at the blinding light of wakefulness. Just like Dr. Mori's infirmary, places like these were always obnoxiously bright. He was starting to think it was a requirement that places of medicine be unbearable to exist in. Or maybe it was just that the notion anyone would want to be healed—to live longer—always made him sick to his stomach. Dazai was usually much better at hiding weak noises like that, though. Maybe he really was sick.

"Oh, you're awake, dear." Pomfrey greeted, hurrying to Dazai's bedside. "How are you feeling?"

Dazai had to blink a few times to clear the fog from his eyes. Once he was sure he was seeing correctly, he pulled his legs up to his chest under the thin blanket and stared at the matron under two lidded eyes. "Fine."

Madam Pomfrey shot him a clearly disbelieving look that Dazai was choosing not to take offense to—doctors were so annoyingly perceptive.

However, she didn't say anything to that effect, only replying softly, "...I'm sure." Pomfrey watched him for a moment longer, then silently grabbed the curtain and pulled it tighter around Dazai's cot.

He drew in a claustrophobic breathe. The curtains now hiding them away from the rest of the room buzzed with the faint tickle of magic. Some kind of privacy charm? He'd have to look more into when he wasn't being backed into a corner.

When she took a step closer, the mafioso's spine tensed automatically. "It's just us here, but things like this are more delicate than the scrapes and bruises you kids tend to come to me for." Her smile was fond for a second, before splitting into unrestrained concern.

Dazai's eyes narrowed into thinner slits.

The matron's whole figure seemed to bleed compassion. It was warm and slimy and was giving Dazai a stomach ache. Hermione should take notes. Her eyes trailed over Dazai's curled-up figure almost assessing before opening her mouth to speak.

Which was also the exact moment Dazai realized—

“Do you feel comfortable talking to me about *this* ?”

—she’d unwrapped his bandages.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting :)

i don't really have time to leave a whole end note atm but i appreciate all the comments and such!!

Only With Your Eyes Closed

Chapter Summary

Everything was easier before people were worried about him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The scars stared back up at him with an unfortunate intensity, rotting a pit of buzzing panic in his skull. Dazai almost couldn't breathe for the still shock that ran through him. Countless thin white and pink lines race across his wrists and snake up towards his elbows. He didn't want to see the patchwork spider's web of cuts marring his flesh—marking him as something incomplete. They looked objectively quite damning, and it didn't take a trained professional like Madam Pomfrey to see that many of them would have been deep enough to kill.

If only.

What she must not have noticed, however, was that not all of the scars were by Dazai's hand. He recognized the precise marks in his elbow as Mori's love, the brutal, thoughtless dents as Father's gifts, and only then the layered slashes as his own desperation. He could try and give each scar a name, but he'd get lost in the grave of memories too easily.

Even when he's cutting, Dazai didn't look. It was like looking at someone else's arm. A human's arm. A demon's.

Looking at it now—even with the caution that came with having an audience — Dazai's brain just stops. Short circuits. He didn't want to see it. He never wanted to see it— this thing he had become. And he never wanted anyone else to see it either. The headache pounding out a steady beat went silent behind the crash of an untamed heartbeat. The marks on his arms were improper and unsightly, and they stung with the weight all the horrible things Dazai didn't like thinking about.

What sort of feeling was that?

"I truly want every student here to feel at home." Madam Pomfrey continued sedately, seeming not to notice the strange panic coursing through the boy before her. She pointedly looked away from Dazai's arms. A skewed sort of privacy. "I don't mean to overstep any boundaries, dear, so I won't pressure you to talk. Just know that if you ever need anything you are welcome to come straight to me."

She wanted a response, but Dazai couldn't quite speak. It burned a childish shame into him, but his focus was so locked onto the arms he hadn't seen in ages that words seemed like a stretch out of possible. Couldn't respond, because the weight of that scar on his arm there,

and this one on his wrist bore here... it all bore the heavy hand of Father yelling and he could hear it echoing now—

The matron sighed, softer and louder than his memory all at once. “I have to tell your head of house about this—I am sorry about that. But I need to know that you’ll be safe.” Her smile was bitter when she set a roll of fresh cotton bandages on the side table. “There are a few things we need to talk about before I can send you on your way, but I imagine you’ll want to be covered up firstly... would you prefer to do it yourself?”

“...Yes, Ma’am.”

Madam Pomfrey only smiled oddly, then excused herself outside the confines of the charmed curtains. Dazai wondered if she had noticed the way his voice shook with effort. He hoped not.

But now that he was alone—relatively—Dazai let his eyes fall closed as he took to applying the fresh bandages. They stayed closed until the buzz of memories and pain and inhumanity died away, replaced only by a sense of distance. Apathy, maybe. Dazai had always been an expert at smothering his emotions. The anxiety and shame now were no different. He covered all his panic beneath cotton gauze.

Dazai had applied his bandages so many times over the years that even now he could do it perfectly without ever seeing. Even now, with his fingertips numb.

Even now...

Dazai took a deep breath and opened his eyes. He was pleased to see only his second skin of cotton and cloth when he worked up the energy to finally look. It was a scratchier bandage than he was used to.

A special kind of torture just for Dazai was having a body at all. But no matter—Dazai's practice at self-restraint made wrangling his emotions relatively easy work. A deep breath and the drag of his nails over too-thin wrists drowned out any residual panic. Never say he wasn’t good at compartmentalizing.

Never say he wasn’t good at *not feeling anything at all.*

Dazai blinked, staring down at the rest of his body where it was hidden under a cloth. Madam Pomfrey hadn’t taken off any of his other bandages—only the ones on his arms. He was relieved, momentarily, that she hadn’t seen everything. He was more relieved that *he* didn’t have to see everything, though.

If only just to prove his inhumanity to himself, Dazai drew a sly smile onto his face and readied a barb on his tongue. It all felt a bit hollow, now.

He should just get up and leave—if he was quick enough, Pomfrey might not even notice. Her “concern” was noxious. But... no, long-term that wasn’t a viable solution. While he was at school here, there was a certain level of control he was sacrificing. If the matron was serious about worrying over Dazai’s scars, she would eventually, regardless of any scheme

Dazai could whip up. Professor Snape, too, if his insistence at going to the infirmary was any indication.

Not that he had any semblance of control back home with Mori and Father. A flash of his Gryffindors and the Loyalty Club flashed through Dazai's head seemingly without cause. He shook the thought away, feeling bitter.

Dazai sighed, pushing the aimless sickness at having seen such a damaged arm (not his arm something else's). He reached out to brush the back of his fingers against the curtain, feeling immediately whatever charm had been in place there flicker and die. No Longer Human buzzed in response but didn't make his headache any worse. Dazai wasn't sure his head *could* hurt any more than it already did, to be fair.

"I'm done." He called, feeling a vague sense of satisfaction when his voice didn't quiver at all. It was a stone, his voice. Cold and empty an nothing more.

Moments before Pomfrey's head ducked in through the curtains, Dazai stuffed the remaining bandages under the too-long sleeve of his cloak. If the healer noticed their going missing, her gentle smile would have been the only tell.

Dazai grinned right back, because his smile was ugly and fake, too.

"I'll just get right to the point," Pomfrey began, "You are *extremely* malnourished. Expending extra magic by practicing spells with your friends was using up what little energy you already had, forcing your body to fall unconscious."

Right, Dazai thought, tearing his focus from the feeling of being so exposed, *I have to deal with you first. If Pomfrey digs too deep into this, she'll eventually find out about the Port Mafia.*

Couldn't have that. Dazai frowned, thoughtful.

Using magic... well, nullifying the troll to death had taken a lot out of him. Damn—he hadn't thought it had been that bad, though. He reached his hands together thoughtlessly to scratch at the skin there, but pulled them back the second he felt the fresh bandage pull over his arms.

"Unfortunately, there isn't a spell I have that can fix this. Are you eating all three meals every day?"

"Well," *I had candy last week, does that count? "* When I remember to."

The pitying expression she wore seemed to expect that response. "It might difficult, but you do need to eat more. Otherwise, I'm afraid you'll only grow weaker." Something changed in her expression that Dazai couldn't track, "And you're too thin already, dear! That young man carried you all the way here like you were nothing more than a stuffed doll."

Dazai winced.

“Three meals a day, remember. If it’s too hard, you can start with something small—just so long as you’re eating *something,* hun. And... if you ever have the urge to hurt yourself, just know you can come straight to me or Professor Snape, alright?”

Dazai looked away and his scars stung. When he replied, his voice was hollow around the edges, “Yes, Ma’am.”

“Good." Pomfrey frowned. It looked like there was more she wanted to say. More she wanted to fuss over. Maybe it was the slipping mask of horror and shame dawning on Dazai's face, but instead of pushing, she only said, "I suppose you can be on your way, then. Curfew is soon, so be sure to hurry straight back to your dormitory.”

“Oh,” was it that late already? “Er, thank you—good night.”

Madam Pomfrey gave him a somber look and stepped back so Dazai could get to his feet. Once he was standing, she added, “I want to see you back here in two weeks, alright? That’s the twenty-first, dear. Just to make sure we’re doing alright.”

Dazai smiled pleasantly. “Is that all?”

She hummed in a way that seemed far more like a sigh than anything more casual. “Go on back, then. I’m afraid the kitchens are closed to students at this hour, but I’ve left a few snacks for you by the door. Take them with you on the way out.”

Once he was sure he was permitted to leave, Dazai hurried out of the infirmary with an embarrassing amount of eagerness. He couldn’t stand the idea of being interrogated by a doctor any longer, even if Pomfrey was significantly less repulsive than Dazai’s own Dr. Mori was. On his way out, he grabbed the small bag of food that had been had laid out for him if only just to appease the matron. The bag crinkled beneath his numb fingers.

Eyes open but not really seeing, Dazai followed his own feet blindly down the hall.

Malnourished— the words tasted funny on his tongue. It wasn’t that unusual to go so long without eating. Dazai frequently went long periods without eating. The only logical conclusion was that killing that mountain troll had taken more out of him than he had originally thought. *And there were benefits to being so thin and small!* Dazai thought defensively. Like looking unassuming or being fast enough on his feet to dodge hits. If his legs shook when he ran that was because he wasn’t good enough, not because he was starving. But thinking about how meager his body was just brought Dazai back to the topic of his mangled, scarred body, opening a gateway for more unwanted thoughts.

He hadn't felt so out of control since before coming to Hogwarts. Waking up completely at someone else's mercy, this inhuman body on display. Maybe it was the familiarity that stung the most. Maybe it was the way that Dazai was at fault—how he should have just been *better.* Good enough to not pass out like a child, or to go to Madam Pomfrey when he was well enough to manipulate the conversation.

Dazai blinked, trying to chase the ugly feeling away, but instead only coming to realize he had absolutely no idea where he was.

He really needed that map now.

Also... probably not his *greatest* idea to let his mind wander while simultaneously navigating the ever-confusing halls of Hogwarts. Whatever. Today was already such a mess, why not also get lost after curfew. Just one more thing to the pile of already tedious things he'd done today.

Dazai tried to conjure a mental map in his head, but was left with only a vague impression of where some particularly interesting secret passages were, courtesy of the Weasley twins. None of which would help him now, of course, considering he had no point of reference for his exact location. He looked around for something identifiable. When nothing stuck out to him after few minutes of searching, he pouted. Though they had nothing at all to say, the living paintings stared down at him through watercolor eyes.

"What's got you looking so glum, Young Snake?"

Dazai flinched.

It wasn't until his eyes locked onto the transparent, bloody figure that he could relax. "Oh, Mr. Ghost Guy."

"It's still Baron." The Slytherin house ghost corrected, floating closer with a cautious eye. "And it's awfully late to be wandering the halls. Where have you been, then?"

The mafioso gave a cursory glance around the hallway. "Just at the infirmary. Only I don't really see the appeal in staying healthy, so I think I'll just commit suicide like you did. The stairway is probably tall enough that if I jumped off while it was moving, my neck would snap."

Voice too flat. Dazai didn't really sound like he was joking this time. He bit down on his tongue as if that might wake it up.

"Right... I'd say you should hurry back to the dungeons before Filch finds you out this late, but perhaps it's best if I escort you."

"Aww, Mr. Ghost is no fun!"

That was better.

If the Baron glared at him in response, that was really neither-here-nor-there. Regardless, the ghost floated away without another word except to grumble under his haunted breath. Dazai trailed two steps behind him with all the blind trust of someone with no care for their own life. There was probably some reason to how the Bloody Baron navigated the halls of Hogwarts, but Dazai couldn't make sense of it.

As they walked, the itch and burn of cheap cotton made Dazai's arms sting. It drew him back to the look in Madam Pomfrey's eyes, the concern thick in her voice. She knew about that now—had seen just how inhuman Dazai was. What was she going to do to him for it? Dazai couldn't shake the sick feeling.

After a moment of following unobtrusively, Dazai's internal panic completely silent, he forced himself to think about something else. Something...

The Baron shot him a sideways glance.

“Ah— Mr. Ghost Guy, what happens if I touch you?”

A frown creased the Baron’s face as he turned to stare down at his temporary ward.

“That other ghost ran away when I tried to touch him.” Dazai clarified.

“Which other ghost?”

“Some jester.”

If he had to guess—which Dazai was usually fond of doing, considering he was generally always right—the bandaged boy would say that the Baron would die (well, the already-dead equivalent, he supposed) just like the troll had. But what was more interesting was if the Baron knew that. When they had first met, the ghost had mentioned an unusual aura around Dazai, but never specified exactly what that meant. But after what had happened on Halloween night... there was a definite theory Dazai was curious to confirm about it.

“Ah,” the Baron hissed, “Peeves—obnoxious little poltergeist. Suppose he ran off to cause mischief and to make a general mess of things. He left you alone?”

“When I reached out for him.” Dazai reiterated helpfully. He retrieved the stolen bandages from his sleeve to drop them into the snack bag, drawing his lips together at the cheap texture. “He screamed.”

Baron floated a few inches further away from Dazai at his announcement, but didn’t seem surprised. “I would imagine so,” he said after a moment, “I suspect most of the ghosts here have been steering clear of you. I ought to be doing to same, so be grateful I’m not leaving you here alone like a wiser spirit might.”

Dazai hummed, keeping his distance.

“Even for an older ghost such as myself, I’ve truly never met someone with the aura you have.”

Auras—he'd casually looked for information on them during his studies. Dazai hadn’t found much regarding them, at least insofar as it should apply to him and his situation. And certainly not in the capacity that made ghosts and goblins afraid of him. Although Dazai suspected the Baron wasn’t sensing an aura in the traditional sense. Rather, he was likely sensing whatever impact No Longer Human was having on their surroundings. If the sting of his ability constantly nullifying the latent magic in the air was any indication, these magical creatures would likely be seeing—

“It’s almost like all the magic in the air is being drawn to you. Eaten up, I’d say.”

—something like that. When No Longer Human nullifies the magic in the air, more magic floods into the space around him to fill the gap. Dazai's current theory was that his ability was sort of like a black hole for magic. Creatures like ghosts, who lived off of latent magic, would risk being nullified as well.

It was a good theory, but still only a theory, and Dazai was hesitant to test it out. The mountain troll had been a great test run, and Hermione's research had helped a lot, but he couldn't be certain until he found a book on the relationship between magic and abilities. If such a book existed, which Dazai was starting to think wasn't the case.

Dazai turned his eyes away from the Baron, brain catching on the phrase *eaten up.* If only he could sustain himself on magic alone, then Pomfrey wouldn't have ever had to take off his bandages. But No Longer Human didn't do anything except give him a headache these days. He sighed, an invisible weight settling on his shoulders.

"Here you are, Young Snake."

Blinking, Dazai's attention snapped back to the ghost before trailing around the hallway. Now that he was looking, the school was no longer an unfamiliar maze. The Baron had walked him all the way back to the dungeons. Dazai hadn't even noticed.

"Go on to your dorm, then. Perhaps we'll meet again sometime if you can ever explain that aura of yours to me." The Bloody Baron's ghostly eyes tracked Dazai's twitching fingers with a weary gaze, "...or perhaps not."

A thought occurred to Dazai. His frown deepened, and he asked, "Only you ghosts know about this aura?"

"Were you wanting to keep it a secret? How very Slytherin of you." The Baron chuckled. "As far as I know, that's correct. Well, I haven't spoken to any of your professors about it, though I can't speak for anyone else. But that's enough talk for tonight. Go off to bed before Filch catches you out after curfew."

The spirit didn't wait another moment before vanishing through a nearby wall. The second he was alone, the emotion dropped from Dazai's face and his arms fell limp at his sides. He stared down the blank space on the wall where the Baron had faded through for only a brief pause before turning back to the Slytherin entrance.

Dazai murmured the password only just loud enough for the stone wall to hear, but the hall still echoed with his voice. That child's whisper that echoed around the empty corridor didn't sound like him, Dazai thought.

He slipped in silently through the passage once it had opened. The common room was lit only by a flickering fire when Dazai crossed the space, but it was still cold enough to raise the hair on his neck. Pomfrey's bag crinkled when Dazai set it down on the chess table. The black king seemed to be watching him.

The fireplace crackled loudly, and Dazai turned to face it.

“Welcome back, friend.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for commenting and reading!

see yall next week

Blaise

Chapter Summary

> Featuring: Dazai being confused about why people are concerned about his unhealthy habits.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Blaise." Dazai said, blinking. He tried not to sigh too loudly, but the other snake had always been adept at reading cues like that, regardless, so there wasn't really a point. "Can we do this tomorrow?"

Blaise looked over Dazai's tense shoulders with quiet eyes. The Slytherin common room was empty except for them, everyone else likely having retired already. But that didn't stop Dazai from feeling claustrophobic under his new bandages. Blaise, though he must have been waiting some time, was still in his daily robes and looking presentable as ever.

How annoying that Dazai could halt the panicked beating of his heart, but he couldn't make himself look as put together as Blaise could. Maybe it was the lack of expression. Right then, Blaise's face seemed to suggest he was thinking a great deal about what he had to say, where Dazai was sure his own face wasn't doing much more than looking tired.

"Are you feeling better?" Blaise said after a moment, not moving from where he stood by the fireplace. His body was framed with fire-light, and Dazai had to look away.

"Aw~, was Blaise worried about me?"

"I still am."

Dazai felt his cheeks dust over before he even registered what Blaise had said. He blinked owlishly for a moment, trying to keep the shock from showing on his face. The obvious show of affection gave Dazai pause. He pasted on a sloppy grin. "Ah, you should be careful what you say! People might get the wrong idea about us~"

In response, Blaise's lips pursed together. "Everyone knows we're friends already, so I don't think that will be a problem."

"You're..." *You can't just say things like that!* The mafioso pouted, pink-faced and feeling flustered. He should have known: Blaise's expression was too serious and his demeanor too genuine to be foiled by his jokes. "...not very nice." He finished lamely.

"You've mentioned."

“Because it’s true.” Dazai grumbled, switching tracks. He walked a finger along the edge of the chess set. “The others went up to bed already, huh? I guess you’re my most loyal subordinate, after all.”

Blaise sighed, carefully trailing Dazai’s fingers while they moved. As if their amble held some meaning. “There aren’t really any benefits to being your subordinate, though. And it’s all a bit confusing, considering *you’re* Draco’s subordinate.”

“Only in name.” *And Ron’s, and the twins’... “* He just hasn’t realized it yet. Besides, it’s a subtle takeover. In a few months everyone will recognize me as their boss one way or another. Maybe. Anyway, I’m going to bed now. Don’t have too much fun brooding in the dark, okay?”

“I’m only out here to talk to you, so don’t just run off like that.”

“You drive a hard bargain! Fine, you can be my second-in-command once I get my gang put together. Goodnight then—”

“Stop joking around.” Blaise interrupted harshly, “I’m being serious.”

Dazai stilled. Even his fingers stopped their march across the board and came to rest beside a black bishop. “So am I. It’s only a matter of time before I decide to get moving on this whole gang thing. Calling Draco Boss will get boring soon and—”

“Dazai.”

“*What?”*

Blaise’s face was pressed together in a rare display of emotion—brows pinched; lips thin. It almost gave Dazai pause, because there wasn’t any meaning beyond that surface-level emotion of *concern. “* You passed out today. Don’t just brush that off like it’s nothing. I'm worried about you.”

Dazai bit his lip, fingers twitching to scratch or pick at skin.

What was it about these Hogwarts students that Dazai just didn’t understand? Why was everyone doing this—this *worried about his wellbeing* thing?

Pomfrey, Blaise, and Hermione were so obviously concerned for his well-being even though they didn’t benefit a single thing from keeping him healthy! And Ron’s insistence that he was a good person, just lonely—it didn’t make any sense! What were they all seeing that he wasn’t? The twins including him in their pranks, the Loyalty Club trying to make him a better wizard... It was almost like they considered him a fellow human.

He wasn’t. *He wasn’t.* Dazai’s ability made sure of that where his own personal downfalls couldn’t add up. At first, he thought there must have been some ulterior motive in treating him kindly, but there wasn’t.

Something about it... Dazai felt sick manipulating such genuine kindness. It confused him. Left him wondering why he felt so at ease surrounded by these idiots.

Mori wouldn't approve.

It all made his head spin and his stomach clench. And Blaise's distressed frown now...

"You're worrying about nothing." Was what Dazai finally settled on, voice dangerously close to a growl. "Madam Pomfrey let me go, didn't she?"

Blaise raised a brow. "That doesn't mean anything." His eyes flitted over Dazai's fingers up and a bandaged arm. Dazai dropped his arms to his side letting his sleeve fall over his hands. "It's just me—you know I don't care enough about anything to hold what happened against you." He paused. Then, almost tentatively, he added, "Boss."

Dazai blinked, pausing and feeling his lips quirk upwards.

"Calling me boss, that's high praise from someone like Blaise! Have I finally earned your loyalty?" He chuckled, disarmed.

"You didn't have to earn anything; I'm just doing whatever I want."

"What a Blaise thing to say." Dazai hummed. He glanced to the chess board. After a long, considering moment, Dazai finally asked, "Play with me?"

For a second, all Blaise did was stare. Finally, he sighed in a way that might have suggested either fondness or annoyance. Dazai could never be sure with Blaise. "Sure." The boy said, crossing the room, "I've been practicing, so don't expect to win as easily anymore."

The bandages stretched over Dazai's skin when he grabbed his king piece, but it didn't stop him from smirking this time. "I wouldn't count on that, if I were you." While he sat, Dazai pushed Pomfrey's snacks off to the side. "White moves first."

Blaise shot him a passive look before taking his seat at the table. He slid a white pawn towards the board's center. "For someone so calculated, I'm surprised you always play black."

"Mori insists on playing white." Dazai said by way of answer, then countered with his own pawn. He couldn't remember a single time he had even been given the option to take white—and along with it the advantage of moving first. Doing so now just felt... strange.

The other boy hummed, but Dazai wasn't watching him to know what sort of expression he was wearing. At the wall, the fire crackled quietly to fill in the lull. Even with the flame blazing constantly, there was a perpetual chill to the Slytherin common room. Dazai shivered.

"Your turn."

He blinked away from the fire and back to the chess set. While Dazai was considering his options, Blaise made a thoughtful sound.

"Draco was really worried, too. In his own way."

A black piece clicked down on the board.

“He kept threatening to sue someone.” Blaise continued. “I don’t know what he thought he’d get out of doing that, considering none of the staff even knew we were practicing out there after class hours. But he was very emphatic about it.”

“Ah, that does seem like him.” Dazai admitted with a chuckle. “It’s your move.”

Blaise squinted down at the board for a moment, resting his cheek on a fisted hand thoughtfully. “Even Pansy seemed worried.”

“Maybe I’ve finally won her over?” Blaise gave him a look. “Well, probably not. I can't really picture that sort of expression on Pansy’s face, anyway.”

“I think she was mostly worried we’d get in trouble for pushing you too hard.”

Dazai paused. “Did you?”

Blaise fingered a white knight on the board for a moment before deciding where to move it. When he set it back down, Blaise glanced up to meet Dazai’s rust-colored eyes carefully. “No.”

“Oh. Good.” Cheerfully, he added, “You’re no use to me as a subordinate if you all have detention.”

“Says the student with detentions every week.” Blaise sighed. This sigh was decidedly quite fond. Dazai pouted and glared down at his rook.

“You're really not nice at all.”

Blaise laughed. It was a subdued thing, but it pulled at the corner of Dazai’s lips regardless. Not a second later, however, Blaise grew serious once more. Dazai tried to hold onto the lopsided grin on his face, but it crumbled at the words, “You haven't been eating.”

Dazai’s blood froze. He felt *watched, stared down,* even though Blaise’s eyes were still on the chess board. There was an odd beating to his heart like his secrets were laid bare. The careful facade Dazai had built up around himself shattered for the second time that day.

Not eating had never been such an ordeal before. With the mafia, more than anything else, his lack of appetite had been encouraged. But now—*here*— a visit to the nurse, a professor’s watchful eye, and now a friend’s serious questioning? Dazai understood humans and their behavior intimately well, but all this...

It had a foreign flavor.

“It’s your turn, Dazai.”

...right. Dazai steeled himself up for a reply warily, even if he wasn’t quite sure why he felt so defensive. “So?” Was all he managed to say. There was no use in denying it, really. When Dazai flipped through his memories of Blaise it quickly became clear the boy wouldn’t

believe him if he insisted otherwise. Blaise had been watching him around food this whole time, Dazai realized belatedly. His stomach did a nervous flip. He'd been so focused on himself and his studies, Dazai hadn't given Blaise's watchful eye a second thought.

Blindly, Dazai moved a piece across the board. "I don't see the big deal."

It's not like I'm dying from starvation, he tried to say with his expression, *so who cares?*

Blaise hummed and pondered over his moves while Dazai contemplated the merits of meeting the other snake's eyes. When Blaise finally glanced up from the board, Dazai was offering a sly smile to him. Just the sort of smile one can practice in a mirror.

"Who's going to run your gang if you spend all year in-and-out of the infirmary?" Blaise intoned. His voice was just south of bored, which could mean any number of things for a person like Blaise.

"My loyal second in command?" Dazai joked lightly, watching as the light of the fireplace turned Blaise's pawns a sickly orange color. It hurt his eyes more to look away. "That won't happen again, anyway."

"You're just going to get better at hiding that you aren't eating, right? That's not a solution."

Ah... "Blaise is no fair, cornering me like this!"

Blaise sighed. His voice was tinged with an odd sort of concern, but the move of his rook across the board was confident. He'd lose within the next few moves—Blaise must have known that. "I wouldn't have to do this if you weren't such an idiot boss."

Dazai's next turn was a quick one. "You *are* mean." The mafioso grumbled half-heartedly. "I'm glad your paper blew away."

"Sure. As if I care about getting a zero in Quirrell's class." Most of the board was stacked against Blaise. There was really no hope for him now, but his pieces forged onward regardless. "What did Madam Pomfrey have to say?"

"'Eat more...' You and her have a lot in common like that. It's annoying." Among other things which... Blaise certainly did not need to know about. Just thinking about it made the cotton on Dazai's arms weigh heavier on him. Curiously, she hadn't really pushed him on the topic. So long as Dazai kept his mouth shut, neither would Blaise.

"She's right, of course." Blaise nodded.

Dazai blinked. He glanced between Blaise and the white king with a look of uncomprehending blankness. "Checkmate."

"Shame," Blaise flicked his king, knocking it over with a woody sound. He didn't sound upset in the slightest. Instead, Blaise's tone was almost amused. "I lost. Eat something before you go to bed, Boss." Without wasting another second, Blaise stood. He waved a hand over his head before retreating to the bedroom where all the other Slytherin students were already fast asleep.

The fireplace crackled quietly at his side in Blaise's wake.

And he was gone just like that, leaving Dazai alone with his thoughts once again. He breathed out heavily for only an audience of half-crumpled chess pieces. They didn't rise to his aid. Dazai picked up Blaise's fallen king and rolled it between his fingers. It was woody and light, and somehow not at all the black king Dazai usually played. He set it back down with a *click* and went about resetting the table.

Once every piece was back in its place, however, there was nothing left to distract from Blaise's words—from Pomfrey's gift sitting across from him at the table. A new opponent. This one Dazai couldn't talk down with a clever play of his black knight. He almost reached out to take it.

There was a skitter of tiny feet on stone.

Dazai startled awake from his thoughts, eyes shooting off for the source of the unexpected sound. It was too small of a sound to be another student, but that didn't rule out magical creatures. Surely if a troll could get in—

Angel's beady, amethyst eye stared right back into his.

"Oh." Dazai felt himself relax minutely, "It's just Ron's creepy rat." Louder, he added, "Your owner's been looking for you, you know."

It watched him in unblinking silence and frightening stillness. Angel always seemed to be smiling beneath that layer of sleek black fur. Unfortunately, it seemed the rat hadn't been eaten by owls, after all.

It was sat on the floor, some distance away from Dazai's feet. Tiny, black claws fit neatly into the grooves of the tiles. Angel's wide, purple eyes seemed to take in everything and nothing at once, and the burn of firelight turned its whole body a gross shade of red. Dazai rolled his eyes.

"Get out of here, shitty demon rat."

Angel scampered away without needing to be told twice.

Creepy little thing.

Dazai shook the odd encounter from his thoughts with a silent reminder to bother Ron about keeping his pet on a tighter leash.

With a huff, he finally reached across the table to root around inside Pomfrey's bag, the brief interaction with Angel oddly waking him from his foggy thoughts. It was stuffed full of crackers and cookies (nothing that would go bad, Dazai noted) and the bandages he had stolen. Dazai drew out a small package of chocolate chip cookies. The little black chips looked likes eyes.

"*Shame,"* he mocked, lip curled in distaste as he dropped them back into the bag. Dazai stood. "That sort of thing would just be too sweet."

He pinched the black king’s crown between his fingers, frowning down at it. The king was really worthless without its army, but it was even worse off without Dazai’s guidance.

Stupid little wooden things.

He flicked it over just to hear it roll across the table and clatter onto the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone's favorite Totally Normal rat, Angel, just popping in for a visit. You know. Like normal rats do.

Thanks for reading and commenting! I love hearing what you all think ^^
See y'all next week!

The Problem Child

Chapter Summary

The next day, Dazai does a lot of thinking and the plot lurches forward at a snail's pace.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*You killed a troll? Congratulations! But please try not to have too much fun while you're away, Dazai. When you come home there won't be any beasts to kill for you to keep occupied. I hope mafia traitors will suffice. You would look so adorable breaking someone's fingers while wearing that red dress—"*

Dazai crumbled up the letter and stuffed it into his bookbag. Every "i" dotted with a heart, the complementary doodles by Elise, the faint odor of sweets and antiseptic sticking to the ink... these letters never got any easier to read. The dismissive tone alone was enough to curl Dazai's lip to his nose in disgust.

Across the table, Ron watched him cautiously. "...bad news?"

"Mori's just being useless as always."

"Right..."

The only good thing to come from Mori's latest missive was the hastily scrawled, "*Please control your owl."* That was infinitely satisfying. Whatever Featherbrain had done to garner such a response from the doctor was entirely worth having to read about all the frilly dresses waiting for him back in Yokohama. That horrible bird deserved a reward for its troubles—maybe Ron would volunteer Angel as bird food if Dazai asked nice enough.

"Are you sure it's okay for you to work with us?"

"I wouldn't call what I'm doing *working."* Dazai yawned. "But I wouldn't be here if I didn't think I could get away with it."

"At the very least," Ron hissed under his breath, motioning vaguely to the full classroom, "Don't you remember Rule One? That's *two* of the three rules you've broken now!"

Hermione perked up beside them form where her nose had been stuffed into her Defense Against the Dark Arts textbook. Somehow, she had managed to blend irritation and concern into one look. "*Please,* you two. We have to finish this assignment before class is over if we *also* want to have time to write the potions essay later today!"

Ron raised a brow. “You know Dazai isn’t going to do either assignment, ‘Mione. And aren’t you the one always worrying about him being bullied?”

“Oh,” Dazai interrupted pleasantly. He spared a lazy glance to where Blaise, Draco, and Pansy were huddled over their textbooks at the other side of the classroom. “They actually said it was okay to work with you all today.”

“They *did?”* Even Hermione turned away from her work. “That doesn’t sound like something Draco would just do...”

He beamed. “Maybe I’m growing on him.”

Which was at least partially true after the events of Halloween (not that he could tell anyone that). And for all intents and purposes, Draco *did* prefer when Dazai stuck with Slytherins and avoided Gryffindors at all costs. Not that Malfoy had any semblance of control over what the mafioso did, of course. But that was neither here nor there. What had actually transpired between the Loyalty Club that morning was this:

It wasn’t five minutes after Dazai had sat down in the Great Hall that Draco and Pansy surrounded him.

“So? What happened yesterday?”

“Hm?”

“Why did you pass out!” Draco clarified in a shout far too loud for the early morning.

Dazai glanced a Blaise, surprised to find only a casual shrug in return. He hadn’t said anything about Dazai starving himself to the others? His lips quirked into a smile. “Madam Pomfrey didn’t tell you?” He put a hand to his heart, playing dramatic. “You’re working me too hard, Boss! She said you need to give me more breaks! And also that you should do my homework—”

“She didn’t say that.”

Silently, while Draco spoke, Blaise slid a piece of toast across the table. Dazai took it with only some reluctance and a pout pasted on his face.

“Well,” Dazai shrugged, “Not that last part, at least. Still, I’m taking a break from the Loyalty Club today, since the nurse said you lot are no good for me.”

Draco’s brow twitched. “She didn’t say that, either.”

“Who are you going to work with in class, then?” Pansy sneered, not at all bothered by Dazai’s announcement, “No one else in Slytherin will even talk to you.”

Hence the change in company, because contrary to Pansy’s low opinion of him, Dazai *did* have a few connections outside of Slytherin. The fact that Draco hadn’t charged over yet to pull him away from Ron and Hermione was about as close to permission as Dazai was going

to get. Besides, what was the *worst* Draco could do to him? Nothing at Hogwarts really stacked up to Port Mafia. Especially with respect to punishment.

“Who cares why I’m over here, anyway?” Dazai whined after a moment, “You love hanging out with me!”

Ron flushed, turning from him to Hermione with a look that made Dazai smirk. “I like your *owl* more than you!”

“Its name is Featherbrain, Ron.”

“No it’s not.” he groaned. The book he’d been skimming was all but forgotten now. “How is she doing, anyway? Last time I was visiting the owlery she wasn’t there.”

Ugh. Dazai sunk lower in his seat at the reminder. “*Featherbrain,”* he emphasized jokingly, “is back now. With Mori’s letter, unfortunately. Just take the stupid owl from me already—maybe Mori will think it died and he’ll stop trying to send me things.”

Hermione perked up from her assignment, quill stalled over the fifth page of her essay. “You really should be on better terms with your guardian, Dazai. I’m sure he’s just concerned as a parent. I know *my* folks are worried about me being in such a foreign place.” She blinked. “Now *please* work on your assignment.”

Instead of humoring her with a reply, Dazai yawned. He tried not to bristle at Hermione’s words, but succeeded only in not flinching away like he’d been hit. Talking about Mori and about parents never ceased to put him ill at ease. Dazai was certain his father had never felt anything like concern for him. Not like Hermione had meant, at least. Things were best like that, though. Dazai cleared his throat mutely, but that didn’t dislodge the tight feeling growing there.

Ron sent him a sideways look before turning back to his own assignment—Hermione really was a good influence on the red head. Still, he only half-heartedly flipped through the pages of his DADA textbook and his paper *certainly* wasn’t the five pages the bushy haired girl was currently boasting. Dazai’s own book was left back in his dorm—no use lugging that thing around when he’d already read it cover to cover. And thanks to Dazai’s near perfect memory, the book itself was rendered almost entirely useless to him now. It had been an interesting read, but not especially practical to him. After all, the only defense to dark magic Dazai needed was his own hand and the sting of No Longer Human.

Speaking of No Longer Human... Dazai let his gaze flit over the heads of every student in the room before finally settling on where Professor Quirrell was grading papers with two shaking hands. The professors were an interesting problem.

It was hard not to notice, really. The way their eyes seemed to linger over crowds of students and remain over anyone who spoke with a too-loud voice. They were still looking for who had killed the troll.

They were looking for *him.*

But claiming the kill wasn't functional for Dazai—not yet. *Not now*, when he still wasn't sure how abilities fit into the magic community. *Not now,* when this secret was only making him a more integral member of Slytherin.

Certainly *not now* when there was still such an important piece of that whole situation missing: why was the troll on the third floor?

It had been bugging him ever since Halloween, but Dazai had been too preoccupied with Slytherin politics and that nasty headache to bother with an investigation.
But Pomfrey's intervention yesterday had shifted the balance a bit: Draco was more than willing to give him a break of practicing magic for a few days in light of her warning, and even his headache had faded somewhat (it had grown significantly less nasty after he ate Blaise's toast that morning—a fact Dazai was steadfast in ignoring). With the two biggest distractions momentarily taken care of, he could finally investigate what had happened during the Halloween feast.

Dazai's cinnamon eyes flicked off of Quirrell, not wanting to be caught staring.

The panicked shout of, " *Troll in the dungeon!"* echoed in his head. How would the troll get from the dungeons to the third floor so quickly? Dazai wasn't willing to discount that it was possible, given how little he understood of how to navigate Hogwarts, but... Hermione had theorized that the mountain troll was drawn to Hogwarts due to the increase in magic at the time. But if that were the case, wouldn't it have gone from the dungeons to the Great Hall, where everyone was gathered? Why bypass the source of its meal in exchange for the empty classrooms on the third floor?

That line of reasoning just didn't add up. So why did Professor Quirrell find the troll in the dungeons?

Dazai's nose scrunched up in thought. He turned to Hermione when the sound of quills scratching over paper didn't clarify any answer. She was just starting in on the sixth page of her essay. Meanwhile, a glance revealed Ron had barely dented his first.

"Hey," Dazai said after a pause, "what do you two think about Professor Quirrell?"

Ron set his quill down, immediately focused on this new conversation like it was a lifeline. He pushed his textbook away. "He's alright, I 'spose. He used to teach Muggle Studies; you know? I hear he was a lot better at it, too."

"Really?"

"Apparently, he took a sabbatical last year and came back a stuttering mess." Ron whispered conspiratorially. "That's what my brothers say, at least."

Suddenly, Hermione sighed. She glared over at them from her work. "You'd know some of this if you stayed awake during class, Dazai. Professor Quirrell talks about his trips all the time. A bit more than he should, to be honest—the textbook doesn't cover half of the things he goes on about!"

“Huh.” Dazai hummed, blatantly ignoring Hermione’s barb while leaning into his palm, “I wonder what happened.”

Maybe Professor Quirrell ran into some foreign mafia while out traveling. That would explain the dangerous vibe Dazai got from him as well as the stuttering. He knew from first-hand experience that involvement with the mafia tended to leave people... *shaken.*

Or maybe that was just the people Dazai himself got to interrogate.

The way Dazai saw it, there were two possibilities for why the ever-anxious Quirrell would report he found the troll in the dungeons:

He was telling the truth, and the mountain troll had wandered to the third floor for some strange reason. It was possible, considering how many secret passages it could have taken to get up that far. Dazai would have to ask Fred and George about that. If this were true, it would potentially explain why students weren’t allowed in that part of the castle. The staff must be keeping something powerful up there that was potent enough to draw in magical beasts.

Or, the alternative: he was lying. The troll had never been in the dungeons and Quirrell had some unknown motivation to cause panic during the Halloween feast. Dazai couldn’t entirely look past this option. No matter how many times Blaise rolled his eyes, he would stick to the fact that Quirrell oozed danger like a second skin. But what was there to gain from sending all the staff down to the dungeons? Unless there was something, he needed to do secretly on one of the higher floors...

Could it be a little bit of both? Dazai mused lightly. He spared another quick glance to Quirrell. Chuckling to himself, the mafioso let his head fall into his arms on the desk. “Ah~ I should take a sabbatical, too.”

“From *what* ?” Ron snorted.

Hermione nodded affirmation but didn’t lift her head from the book. “You can’t take a break if you were never working.”

“I’ll take a nice vacation from the land of the living, then. Maybe I’ll enjoy a swim in the river Styx!” He felt Hermione’s vexed huff more than heard it. Dazai turned to Ron. “Speaking of the underworld, I saw your rat yesterday, Ron. You should keep a closer eye on it.”

Ron perked up. “Angel! You found him?”

“In the Slytherin common room.” Dazai nodded lazily. “It went there just to taunt me.”

"I haven’t seen him in weeks! I was starting to think Mrs. Norris ate him!”

Despite all the time Dazai spent wandering the halls of Hogwarts, he’d actually had very few interactions with the caretaker Filch and his cat, Mrs. Norris. Still, the image of Angel being eaten wasn’t an entirely unpleasant one. “One can only dream.”

“Oi,” the Weasley grumbled. When he didn’t look too put off, Dazai smirked. Dazai's gaze flicked back to Quirrell.

Dazai spotted Professor Quirrell coming towards them a few seconds before the man arrived, and his smile stuck in place like it had been glued together hastily. He watched the man approach with a certain degree of practiced surprise—it wouldn’t do to give away that he had, in fact, been monitoring the strange professor all class period. Beside him, Ron jolted into action over his essay, probably in hopes to look busy.

A hand landed on his shoulder.

“W-working hard, you three?” Professor Quirrell stuttered.

The professor’s shivering hand had settled down on the folded black cloth of his cloak in a light pat. He must have noticed how Dazai froze up under the touch because the hand pulled off almost immediately.

Dazai blinked two thinned eyes up at the turban-wearing teacher. A cursory glance told him that Quirrell hadn’t made any rounds to the other students, which meant he’d sought out someone in Dazai’s group intentionally. Curious. And definitely suspicious in light of Dazai’s current line of thinking regarding the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. It was probably for the best that Hermione answered before the mafioso could.

“Yes, Sir. I’m almost finished with the first half now, actually!”

Quirrell’s eyes dropped to the six full pages spread out in front of Hermione with an impressive amount of trepidation, even by his own standards. “O-oh. Well... there’s n-no harm in being concise, you know, Ms. Granger.”

“But that would hardly express the complexities of the Verdimilious charm, Professor!”

Dazai snorted, drawing their attention to himself. “It’s not that complicated.”

“It is too,” she stabbed a finger into her textbook as if to emphasize her point. Dazai only raised a brow, not even bothering to spare a glance at the text. He’d read it already. The Verdimilious charm was not that complicated. *Certainly* not complicated enough to warrant *six whole pages* worth of analysis. What was she even writing there, anyway? “*You’ve* never even successfully cast it!”

“That doesn’t mean anything, Hermione. I’ve never successfully cast anything.”

He heard Ron sigh. “Don’t say that so proudly, mate.”

“A-actually,” Professor Quirrell interjected, looking a bit overwhelmed by where the conversation had gone without him, “that i-is something I was hoping to talk with y-you about, Mr. Dazai.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and commenting! It means a lot :)

I'll see y'all next Saturday!

Dazai Accidentally Gets Adopted

Chapter Summary

> The twins might adopt Dazai as their little brother. I don't know. It's all very self-indulgent.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai sighed, practically melting into the table with the force of his exhaustion.

Remedial lessons with Professor Quirrell. *After* his remedial lesson with the Loyalty Club.

And just after all this nonsense about overworking himself, too. Maybe he should tell Madam Pomfrey and she'd make everyone leave him alone since they're just going to pester him over being his able to do magic or not. Thinking about how invasive she had been last time though...

Dazai shook his head. *Definitely not, then.*

Apparently, his overall lack of magical skill was finally reaching a point of recognition.

"I-I'm worried that y-y-you'll fail, Mr. Dazai." Quirrell had said, *"S-so I would like for you to attend some r-r- remedial lessons with me starting this week."*

Dazai huffed.

And *Quirrell* of all professors! Literally the one person in this school Dazai was most suspicious of reached out to help him (or some other nonsense like that). He wasn't sure whether to feel threatened or amused. Threatened, because Quirrell might *actually* be bad news—in which case him keeping a closer eye on Dazai could only spell trouble. Or amused, because this certainly gave him an opportunity to scope out the Halloween situation first-hand.

Well... maybe it was a little bit of both.

Regardless, it was an interesting situation to be in for sure. Dazai thought about writing as much to Mori, but in the end had decided to hold back. He had some time before his next letter was scheduled—a lot could change in even such a small amount of time. Or not. But any time spent not writing to Dr. Mori was time well spent. In the meantime, Dazai put his efforts into reading up in the library.

Magic lessons with the Loyalty Club were one thing. Dazai could easily blame his lack of magic ability on incompetence or even just citing that he was a muggleborn. With how rampant muggleborn prejudice was in Slytherin, Draco and Pansy accepted that line of reasoning without much complaint at all. But magic lessons with a professor were an entirely different beast. Dazai could only hide so much under the eyes of a trained wizard. Surely Professor Quirrell would eventually notice that Dazai wasn't failing at spells so much as completely incapable of doing them. Right?

Dazai didn't know how to feel at the prospect of Quirrell knowing about No Longer Human. At least not while these books still had nothing to offer him on the subject.

With a long sigh, Dazai shook his head.

One thing at a time. Lucky for Dazai, he'd convinced Draco to give him a few more days off of Loyalty Club lessons by paraphrasing some of Pomfrey's worried drivel from the other day.

For now, however, Dazai was hunched over a massive blue book in the library, surrounded by blossoming towers of other tomes he had selected. While there were a few works focused on the subject of magical creatures around him, Dazai was content with what he knew now. He didn't need to know what types of creatures there were, just why he could kill them with a touch. For now, Hermione's explanation seemed to check out. Although his readings had revealed the rather humorous fact that some considered humans to be magical *beasts* rather than *beings*, which Dazai had found infinitely amusing.

The book he was currently digging through discussed some of the more complex theories behind magical incantation and spell casting. Though nearly three-hundred pages in with no mention of special abilities, Dazai was still optimistic that it would prove its worth somehow. He flipped a page, eagerly kicking his feet under the table.

The theory here *was* interesting. Incredibly so. It had laid out the basics of what was taught in class, but it hadn't just stopped there. No—everything discussed in the book perfectly described what Dazai had been feeling all along. Every time No Longer Human reacted to nearby spell casting, he was feeling how latent magic in the atmosphere reacted to the flick of a wand and a muttered word. And the book propped open before him was describing it in such perfect detail that Dazai was able to mentally return to his previous experiences with others' magic and dissect exactly what they had done. He was almost looking forward to class on Monday, if only just to experience it again with this new knowledge.

What Dazai found to be perplexing, however, was that everything in the book was strictly theoretical. Wizards seemed to understand, in general, that they possessed the ability to manipulate this magical energy, but the mechanics of how were entirely guesswork for them. With No Longer Human, however, Dazai could feel every *shift,* every *push* and *pull,* every *spark* that indicated the incantation of a spell. If only he wasn't nullifying everything he touched, Dazai would know *exactly* how to shape a spell.

Any spell, really.

Dazai wondered how much *better* wizards could be at magic if they could only just feel what he could feel. If they could only just sense the magical mechanics of their casting, certainly wizards could twist it however they liked outside of the constraints of *wand-waving* and *pseudo-Latin speaking.*

Damn. Dazai would have made a great wizard.

But still, no say on how abilities factored into the magical community. It was almost annoying that there was absolutely no mention of abilities in any of the texts he'd read so far. Nothing. Sure, the magical community was relatively hidden from the world as a whole, but the phenomenon of special abilities was hardly disguised. With all the ruckus most ability-oriented organizations made, there should at least be some mention, right?

Dazai shook off the thought with a rather literal flick of his wrist to turn the page. At the top of the page, in bolded letters, it read, "*The Fundamental Laws of Magic."*

However, just moments before Dazai could read any further, a pair of hushed shouts stole his attention. The unexpected noise shocked him out of his relative peace, racking a flinch through Dazai's body with enough force that he accidentally slammed the book shut.

When he turned up from the desk, Dazai was immediately met with two matching sets of intense auburn stares. He tried not to startle back, but it was difficult with how quickly they approached him—almost as if a fire was lit on the soles of their feet.

"Fred and George! Hello. What's wrong?" Something *must* have been amiss if their searching gazes were any indication. A prank went wrong, and they were hoping he would cover them? Filch hot on their tails? Dazai glanced around them but didn't see any staff except for the librarian's desk near to library doors. The twins each looked him up and down with unflinching scrutiny. Uncomprehending, Dazai's nose scrunched up. "Why are you two looking at me like that?"

The Weasleys shared a look before taking a step back. Dazai let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd taken in, but noted that the frame of worry still held their shoulders straight. How curious. Dazai let his confusion show on his face.

"Are you okay?!"

Dazai blinked away from them at the sudden intensity of two voices shouting at once. Then he frowned. "As fine as I can be... why?"

George hovered over him, fretting, "We heard you were in the infirmary!"

"What happened?!" Fred finished.

What? It took a second for the words to register in Dazai's brain. When it did, his lips grew thin. Dazai tried to keep his voice pleasant when he asked, "Who did you hear that from?"

Not that it wasn't true, obviously. But it *was* curious that the twins should find out. He hadn't thought anyone in the Loyalty Club would blab about what had happened—especially

considering that Dazai had been telling them it was *their* fault for overworking him. And if any of the other Slytherins had overheard, somehow, they definitely wouldn't be motivated to tell a Gryffindor anything. "Not Madam Pomfrey." He said after a moment.

"Er—" one twin started and the other finished hastily, "—word gets around. Especially to us.*"*

Dazai willed the expression on his face to fall flat. *They're lying,* his brain supplied without prompting, *why?*

"I was in the infirmary Thursday." He answered honestly. Then, carefully, he added, "Professor Snape has been badgering me to get that cut on my arm looked at. I finally found my way over there, is all. Madam Pomfrey looked it over."

It was technically the truth, and Dazai could tell from the way the fight drained out of the twins that they believed it, too. No mention of his malnourishment. No mention of his other cuts. Perfect—just the sort of lie by omission that even Mori might fall for if Dazai was careful enough with his delivery. The mafia member gave himself a mental pat on the back.

Just thinking about the other night had his cuts singing underneath their new, rough bandaging. Dazai scratched his wrist while the twins silently deliberated. After a moment, they seemed to come to a suitable conclusion—relief.

It was a little jarring, actually, to see that expression directed at him. Relief said *I'm glad you aren't hurt* in a way that went beyond the succeeding *because you're useful to me.*

No... this expression before Dazai now lacked all of the affect of possessiveness that was so familiar. Had Mori ever felt this type of relief when he realized Dazai wasn't hurt too badly? Did Father?

"Uh, Dazai?"

Dazai startled out of his thoughts with a blink. "What—*oh.* Oops."

Without realizing, he hadn't stopped scratching at his wrist. While Dazai's thoughts wandered away from him, he'd only started picking at the dry skin there with more intensity. The thought had him sharpening his nails deeper in the flesh of his scarred arm absently. There wasn't a reason for it—he just happened to dig deeper into his flesh when thinking about going home. Dazai's nails broke through the pale skin of his bird-thin wrist and had welled up with blood.

He drew the offending limb back like he'd been stabbed. In a way, he had. A few stray drops of crimson snaked out of the claw marks, but Dazai quickly wiped them away.

Dazai shot a numb look to the twins, if only just to see what sort of expression they were wearing. The relief was gone from their faces, replaced by matching sets of wide eyes. The concern was palpable there. The worry. The *panic.* Before they could start floundering over him, Dazai did what Dazai did best:

“Well, that’s unfortunate.” He told a joke. “I... *huh.”*

It was actually kind of hard to joke about accidentally scratching your arm open though. He didn’t even think the wound was deep enough to warrant a joke about suicide.

“Anyway,” Dazai tucked his wrist beneath a sleeve and hid it behind his back as if that would lessen the offense. He offered a smile just south of genuine. “Was there something else you two needed?”

Another shared look between the twins—another message flying right over Dazai’s curly-haired head. George was the first to speak, “Okay, can we backtrack, like, five seconds?”

“I don’t think that’s necessary.” Dazai wasn’t sure if he succeeded in keeping the vague embarrassment from his voice. He certainly wasn’t keeping the pink tint off of his cheeks.

Fred made an almost offended sound, “Actually I think that’s a great idea. Did you just... *Are you okay?”*

“*Please* let me see your hand.” George insisted, “I know the healing spell, hold on—”

Healing spell... *Healing spell—oh.* What was it? *Episkey?* Whatever the verbal cast was, it wasn’t going to work. Snape had already proved that well enough during their trip to Diagon Alley.

Fantastic.

He should definitely stop them before they actually try to heal his new wound, but *damn* if Dazai didn’t want to feel them cast the spell now that he knew what to focus on.

“That’s,” Dazai chuckled weakly, dodging to the left when George tried to move around him, “fine. It’s fine.”

“It’s not fine,” they said as one, “you’re bleeding!”

“Only a little. And be quiet—we're in the library.” More than that, he didn’t want Madam Pince coming over and seeing him like this. “I’ll wrap it up later—if it’s even still bleeding. Just tell me why you were looking for me. It wasn’t *just* about Thursday, was it?” How annoying. The sting of his open wrist drew the whole conversation into heightened focus.

Fred puffed his cheeks out and planted his hands firmly on his hips, meanwhile, George’s obvious concern didn’t abate in the slightest. “Nope, no can do, Snakey.”

“There’s no distracting us from this one.” George nodded seriously, “Hand out, please.”

There were actually quite a few things Dazai could do to distract them, not in the slightest limited to: lying, sweet-talking, and punching one of them in the face. But... for some reason that sort of thing made his stomach turn. Dazai wasn’t sure what sort of feeling that was, but he didn’t like the idea of hurting the twins like that. Now that he was thinking about it, Dazai was really quite fond of them, wasn’t he?

Gross.

That thought, more so than any other, turned his intestines inside-out. It steeled any reservations he might have had. Fond... no, Dazai wasn't *fond* of anyone. He felt sick at the revelation.

"Actually," he said, voice low, "I'm not feeling well. Can we do this later?"

"No—"

Dazai eyed the twins with an empty glare, defensive. "Drop it." His tone was certain and sharp—the sort of tone you might use on a rowdy subordinate. Fred and George weren't his subordinates in the slightest, but they were entirely out of line. He cleared his throat. "Did you need information for a prank? If not, I'll be leaving now."

A stolen glance between Fred and George indicated another silent conversation. Dazai only watched with a blank look.

The twins had never called him Boss, had never sworn loyalty, had *nothing* to gain from fretting over him. It was curious as much as it was revolting. At least when Dr. Mori cleaned Dazai's wounds, he had the decency to make his motives obvious.

At least Dazai was useful to him.

"I guess not, then."

"Dazai," George interrupted before the young mafioso could storm off, "I don't know what you're thinking, but stop."

"If you don't want us looking at that, at least let us walk you to the infirmary. Merlin knows you'll get lost if we don't."

"Ah," Dazai blinked, feeling his morbid thoughts disperse abruptly, "I'm not really hurt." Then, shyly, he mumbled, "It was an accident, anyway. And I just went the other day..."

The twins looked relieved again. It was a different type of relief this time. "And now you're going again. Come on." They each held out an arm to him, looping their elbows together to practically lift Dazai away from the desk. Dazai tensed under their hold, finding he couldn't break free without hurting one of them. The idea rankled.

Because he was so much smaller than the twins, Dazai was easily carried along. They carted him straight from the library. "I was reading, you know. What about all of my books!" He sputtered. But the fight had mostly left him—replaced by an overwhelming befuddlement with the latest turn of events.

"Madam Pince will put them away."

"Or Hermione will come and scavenge them later. Whichever comes first."

Being pulled down the Hall by a serious pair of Weasley twins was starting to draw eyes from other students. A mix of perplexed, amused, and vaguely concerned stares followed them across campus. Dazai felt himself wanting to duck away under all the looks. He couldn't do that, but he did shuffle further behind the twins.

Dazai caught Fred's smirk at the movement and refused to be embarrassed.

After what felt like a too-long time under that many stares, they finally arrived at the infirmary. The twins wasted no time in guiding him through the door. It looked the same as it had two nights before. Just as obnoxiously bright. He didn't feel quite as panicked as he had then, though. Now he was mostly feeling numb.

Good.

Neither Fred nor George had released their holds on him just yet.

"Madam Pomfrey!" Fred called, "You remember Dazai, don't you?"

Just as he spoke, the matron appeared from behind a bed curtain. Her face was pressed together in something like amusement or concern. "Dazai—*oh,* did you need something, dear? Perhaps more snacks?"

Dazai bristled at the mention, but George spoke over his discomfort, "He scraped his arm. Could you give him a talking to about getting help when he needs it, please? I don't think our favorite little snake is willing to listen to us."

Definitely amusement and concern—somehow both, really. Without hesitation, Madam Pomfrey rushed forward to make room for Dazai on the cot. The twins guided him to it, despite Dazai grumbled protests. Pomfrey must have spotted the blood, because she was already inspecting his wounded, bony wrist before Dazai had registered sitting down.

"Oh, *hun*." The matron sighed, voice soft and disgusting. Dazai tensed up when she began to wipe the blood clear.

"You're very troublesome, you know," Fred said lightly, then George continued, "You don't have any older siblings, do you?"

Dazai blinked, lost. "No?"

A hand wiped down his arm. The pressure burned like nothing else—Pomfrey was being too soft. Dazai tried not to think about it—to focus on anything else. Flinching now, under all these eyes, wasn't an option. He pulled a shaky smile onto his lips and kept his gaze locked somewhere between Fred and the matron.

"It shows." George nodded, like that meant something, "You need a big brother to watch out for you. This is the *second time* you've been bleeding since we met."

"Only two?" Dazai tried to mimic that joking tone.

Madam Pomfrey answered for the twins, "That's enough of that, now. Two times is plenty."

Fred clearly agreed. He and his brother were a constant hovering presence over Dazai's shoulders, and the matron was hunched warmly over his wound. It was a strange feeling, to be surrounded without being afraid.

He wondered what Mori was up to these days.

Chapter End Notes

this entire chapter is just me wanting someone to fuss over dazai. my apologies. i'm weak.

Thanks for reading and commenting! I LOVE hearing your thoughts and ideas!
See yall next week for some more quirrell stuff! :)

Verdimillious

Chapter Summary

Dazai has his first remedial lesson with professor Quirrell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Sorry, I can't."

Ron blinked. He looked somewhere between offended and curious before finally settling on suspicious. Knowing Dazai's track record, that was probably a fair assessment. He crossed his arms and puffed out his cheeks petulantly.

Dazai offered the red-head an apologetic, if fake, look. "You'll have to visit Featherbrain without me. I know it can be tough, spending time apart, but I'm sure you can manage—"

"Oi!" Ron barked. Then, almost subdued, he asked, "What's keeping you busy, anyway? Not some chore one of those nasty Slytherin has for you, I hope."

"Ah, nothing like that, really." When the Weasley clearly wasn't satisfied with such a general answer, Dazai laughed. "My extra-special bonus lessons with Professor Quirrell start today."

"Oh. Good luck with that—I'm glad he's not just taking anyone for extra lessons!"

Dazai chuckled. He patted his bookbag, feeling for his wand in there, "Just for those of us who have never cast any spells, I'm afraid." After a pause, he added, "He'll get sick of me eventually. Until then, you'll have to keep Featherbrain entertained yourself." Well, barring his trips to deliver Mori letters.

Ron deflated a bit at the explanation. "Maybe if you actually put a bit of effort into your spell casting, you'll be free in no time. But I guess you're just going to laze around, aren't you?"

Actually, that was one of the problems Dazai was currently debating with himself. He *couldn't* do magic, so slacking off during class was exceptionally beneficial. This way, he gave off the appearance of someone who couldn't bother to try rather than someone who probably shouldn't have been accepted into Hogwarts in the first place. But one-on-one lessons with Quirrell posed a certain threat to that persona. He'd have to do *something* during their lessons. It was really just a question of *what.*

His current plan involved recalling some of his readings and hoping for the best. Worst case scenario, Professor Quirrell realized that Dazai didn't have magic and he got expelled. Dazai

would get to laugh in Mori's face, Hogwarts wouldn't have to deal with him... it was kind of a win-win. But so was getting to stick around a bit longer away from home...

Dazai shrugged, smiling emptily. "I have to go now. You're welcome to steal Featherbrain while I'm gone, of course—"

"Just go already," Ron laughed, "I already know you're going to get lost on the way. Better get a head start, mate."

In return, the mafioso merely smiled. That much was true, of course. He waved pleasantly as Ron turned off in the direction of the Owlery. It wasn't until the red-head was around the corner that Dazai dropped his hand to his side. How tedious, remedial lessons. At least Dazai was looking forward to talking with the only other person to have seen the mountain troll alive outside of Dazai himself and Draco.

Currently, Professor Quirrell was the only unknown in that equation.

How interesting, Dazai thought to himself. He twirled on his toes and began walking in the opposite direction Ron had. *And dangerous—* but that thought didn't lesson his excitement. The thrill of the unknown only made Dazai's trip to Quirrell's office a quicker one, as he eagerly hurried through the halls.

Dazai hugged the wall. He was quite fortunate to know the Weasley twins because—*ah,* there it was! There was a slightly yellow stone on the wall that, if pushed just right, opened up a secret door in the wall. Dazai rested his spread fingers over the brick, applying pressure until the door clicked. What was before a wall of grey stones swung open to reveal a passage. It led straight to Professor Quirrell's classroom, and was quite possibly the only reason Dazai hadn't completely given up on making it to class every day.

How the twins knew about this secret path—among all the other secrets they knew about—was a mystery, but Dazai wasn't complaining. He skipped through the dark tunnel, humming a light tune, as the door slid shut behind him. When both sides of this route were shut, it was blissfully quiet. It wasn't a minute of walking through the empty corridor that Dazai was popping out on the other side.

Quirrell's classroom was right across the hall. Dazai took a deep breath and walked right up to it before knocking with the backs of his knuckles. It *rapped* noisily in the mostly empty hall.

There was a shuffling noise from behind the door and a muted, "C-c-coming!" that drew an amused smirk onto Dazai's face. He waited with his hands behind his back, swaying on his feet like a little kid might. From the other side of the door, Dazai heard a thud as if something fell over in Quirrell's haste. Dazai took a step away from the door just in time for it to swing open.

Professor Quirrell's anxious face blinked down at him. It seemed to take him a moment to realize who exactly had come to visit him. Quirrell's worry melted. "Mr. Dazai! C-come in."

“Gladly,” Dazai smiled pleasantly, sliding in past his professor and into the classroom. It was strange seeing the class empty of his peers. He noted, with some amusement, that a stack of papers and scrolls had fallen to the floor near the man’s desk. Dazai walked up to where he usually sat during class before turning around to watch as Quirrell shut the door. “Thank you for having me, Sir.”

The professor offered a shaky smile in return before moving to his desk to collect the fallen pages. Probably student assignments, if the red marks over them were any indication. Most of them didn’t look to actually be graded yet. Quirrell must have noticed Dazai’s wandering gaze, because he made a small sound. “Y-you won’t have anything in here, I-I'm afraid. Having n-never done one of my assignments, after all.”

“Writing all that down just seems boring.”

Quirrell hummed, returning the completed assignments back to what must have been their original position. It was still a mess. The papers were spread haphazardly around the desk in seemingly random fashion. He turned a semi-serious gave to Dazai. *Right to business, huh?*

“The staff has had many... many m-meetings about you. N-not doing homework and disregarding directions. Arriving to class late.” Professor Quirrell told him, eyes flicking to the wall intermittently. “We discussed r-remedial lessons a f-few times. But in the end... ah, it-it was only me who thought you might b-b-benefit from them.”

Dazai felt his eyes narrow minutely. “Why’s that, Sir?”

The other professors were right, of course, Training him with magic wouldn’t yield any results no matter how much he tried. That sort of thing was just unreachable. Probably what had him on the professors’ bad side was that he refused to do his homework. Though it made the fact that Quirrell hadn’t also fallen into Dazai’s manipulation all the more curious.

“M-maybe I’m just a f-fool,” Quirrell answered, and Dazai forced himself to relax, “But I-I've always thought e-e-every student should get the help they need, i-if they do need it.”

Oh. Dazai blinked. Just a teacher who wanted all his students to succeed? *Maybe,* he thought, setting his bag down on a desk. Still, there was that something about Quirrell that put Dazai on edge. He smiled, regardless. “I’m not sure it will do much good. Even like this, I don’t think I’ll try very hard.”

“Nonsense!” The man, somehow, looked pleased with himself, “W-we’ll figure out something for you, I’m sure. E-every student learns different.”

But threats of violence were the great equalizer in learning, Dazai knew. He had the scars and the skills to prove it. “Maybe.”

Professor Quirrell nodded, evidently reassured by something in Dazai’s expression. “R-right, then. I think the p-problem isn’t the material itself, is it? J-just the spells. So we’ll work on that. Let’s s-see your w-w-wand.”

Taking his eyes off of Quirrell for a moment, Dazai withdrew his wand case from his bag. It was as clean as ever—probably from disuse more than anything else. It opened with a click. Dazai took out his wand and gave it a lazy wave, then set the case on top of his bookbag.

“Ah, Blackthorn? A very nice wood. I h-hear it’s best suited for a warrior.”

“Ollivander must have been mistaken, then.” Dazai replied listlessly, turning the wand over in his hand.

“Well, th-there's more than that, of course. I’m n-n-not a wandmaker, but I’m sure you m-might find that sort of thing in the library if you s-so wanted. May I ask, w-what the core is?”

Dazai blinked. “Blood.” He paused, rolling it over in his thoughts for a moment. Was there something else in his wand, too? He hadn’t bothered to ask what else would go into the making of his wand after handing over the vial of his blood. Not that it mattered much, in the end. It was never going to work for him anyway—guess he really bled for nothing, back then. “Maybe. I forget.”

Professor Quirrell’s eye twitched. It was an odd expression, but it was quickly covered up by that nervous concern once more. Dazai watched the man draw out his own wand. Quirrell’s wand was a lot lighter in color than the blackthorn in Dazai’s hands. He couldn’t identify the wood type, though.

“Alder wood.” The professor said suddenly, catching his gaze, “U-unicorn hair core. Nine inches long. N-not quite so p-pointy as yours, I’m afraid.”

Dazai grinned at the wary glance Quirrell shot his way. He laughed hollowly. “What spells are we going to be doing today, Sir?”

Quirrell cleared his throat. “Y-you recall the Verdimillious charm from class th-this week? I’d l-like to start there, since it’s fresh on your mind.”

The Verdimilious charm was exceptionally simple, Dazai recalled. A simple swish of the wand and saying the spell name allowed the caster to spawn green sparks. Granted, it had a couple of interesting applications. It hurt to touch the sparks, but if left to float around the room it could illuminate shadows or reveal things hidden by magic. Interesting. Still not worthy of more than six pages, *Hermione.*

Nodding, Dazai rolled his wrist experimentally. If his lessons with the Loyalty Club were any indication, Dazai would be standing here for hours waving his hand around uselessly. After a while, his wrist was going to get sore. When Quirrell gave him a look to continue, Dazai pointed his wand out at the empty room. “Verdimilious!”

...nope.

Even now that Dazai had a better idea of what the latent magic around should be doing, there was really nothing to observe. It just continued to buzz around him, undisturbed except to be nullified when it wandered too close. Dazai’s stomach roiled with an unexpected wave

of nausea, however, and he had to bite down the discomforted expression rising to his face. He shrugged and looked to Professor Quirrell, unsure if he was meant to keep trying.

The teacher wore a strange look on his face. Serious, contemplative. Altogether, it wasn't the anxious look Quirrell typically wore. Dazai wondered just what he was seeing with those thinned, assessing eyes. Quirrell blinked when he noticed Dazai watching him for a response, then smiled shakily. "Y-your f-form is perfect! I'm... I'm n-not really sure what's not working for you. I... l-let me—"

Quirrell raised his own wand in the arm and gave it a flick. "Verdimilious!"

The instant his professor cast the spell, Dazai could feel the magic react. His wand, pushing the air into shape; his words telling it how to move. There was a quiver in the air, then the space before them lit up with a hundred little green lights. Before the shines could travel too far, Quirrell dismissed them with another wave of his wand.

Dazai hummed low in his throat, trying to recall what exactly the man had done. If he closed his eyes, Dazai could almost envision what the magic looked like the second before it had taken shape as Verdimilious. He tried to look nonchalant. "Sir?"

"Y-you said the c-core was blood?" Quirrell frowned, deliberative, "I'm not sure I-I've ever heard of such a thing before."

"Blame Ollivander." Dazai shrugged, giving his wand another wave through the air. This time, he focused on the sensation of Quirrell's magic, still a lingering image in his mind, to no luck. With a sigh, he dropped the wand back to his side. A quiver of unrest curled in Dazai's stomach aimlessly. "I'm just no good with magic like this." He paused, then added, "I'm more interested in other things, I guess."

"S-such as?"

"Magical theory, chess," Dazai counted off on his fingers, "pranks."

"W-what an interesting r-range! N-not particularly u-useful in m-my class."

He made a thoughtful noise. "Maybe not. Although perhaps you know a bit about magical creatures from your travels, Professor? I've been wanting to look into that topic ever since Halloween. With the troll, and all."

Professor Quirrell regarded him for a second. He smiled thinly. "Y-yes, well. We can't j-just talk all hour. T-try once more time f-f-for me, please."

Dazai blinked, feeling his lips turn up at the corners involuntarily. A non-answer like that... *how suspicious.* Dazai tried not to feel too amused at the casual dismissal. "You got it, Sir. I wouldn't expect much, though."

"I s-suspect that you are m-much better than you think, M-Mr. Dazai."

His fingers twitched over his wand, but Dazai only smiled. Suddenly, the room felt too small. As instructed, he tested the charm once more to no result. No Longer Human tickled at the

attempt.

“How curious...” Professor Quirrell trailed off. Something about the man’s interest made the hair on the back of Dazai’s neck stand straight. “Another p-p-perfect cast.”

Another perfect failure, Dazai thought, unsurprised. Quirrell seemed to want a reaction, though, so Dazai beamed at him. Twirling the wand between his fingers, the mafioso mused, “You can’t fix everyone.”

“P-p-perhaps not.”

“Perhaps not.” Dazai echoed lightly. “Shall I try again, Sir?”

Quirrell smiled pleasantly. “I should think s-s-so.”

Before the night was up, Dazai’s headache had returned in full-force, and not a single successful cast was there to show for it. But the sharp glint in Quirrell’s eyes as he watched his student cast over and over again...

Dazai tried not to find the whole ordeal too exciting. Hogwarts was too boring without something to investigate, after all.

Chapter End Notes

im tired LOL i didn't even edit this chapter tbh

thanks for reading and commenting, yall! i love hearing what yall think!!
Next chapter goes up next saturday, as usual :)

Blackthorn Berries

Chapter Summary

Dazai does some reading.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai skimmed the book in front of him, staring blankly down at its pages.

...Why was he looking at this again? Knowing how wands worked wasn't going to help him at all—Dazai couldn't even do magic! He huffed as loud as he could for the library and flipped the page.

Stupid Quirrell and his stupid talk of wand-making. It was as if he *knew* that once Dazai was turned onto an idea, he would have to see it through.

He stared down blankly at a page titled, "Blackthorn, Part 4." Dazai was starting to think the author might be a distant relative of Hermione's for how easily they spread a paragraph's worth of information into four chapters.

"I told you two he'd be here."

Dazai blinked at the interruption, but kept his eyes locked on the book. Obnoxious! People could be so noisy, even in the library. Wasn't there anywhere in this miserable school where Dazai could study in peace?

He sunk further into his seat, reading over the line, "the average blackthorn flower is 1.5 centimeters in diameter, which is vital to the wand making process, of course, for a number a critical reasons..." dispassionately. Dazai willed the students to shut up and go away with the stiff hold of his shoulders. At least back home, Dazai had the quiet of his room for studying. Whether it was the library or the bedrooms at Hogwarts, someone was always chattering about.

"Hey Dazai, aren't you listening? I said, good evening."

Dazai stop-started. His eyes shot up from the book to see a blonde Slytherin leering down at him.

"Draco!" He slid the book across the table. It was probably better over there, anyway. "I don't think I've ever seen you in the library. I was starting to think you were allergic to studying!"

The boy bristled, but looked amused behind all the rich-kid exterior. “Don’t you have that the wrong way around?” Draco’s shadows, Crabbe and Goyle, held none of the vague humor of their boss. They were all protective, dim-witted anger hovering over Draco’s shoulder. Dazai didn’t even spare them a glance.

“I don’t know~ I seem to recall someone failing their last potions assignment. That’s not very studious of you, Boss.”

Draco smiled thinly. It wasn’t really much of a smile, in the end. “Exactly how many potions have you exploded again?”

Dazai paused, then shrugged. “Anyway—”

“That’s what I thought.”

“—did you need something?” He clapped, voice pitching childishly, “Oh! Did you come to wish me luck in my studies? Thanks for cheering me on! But I’m planning to fail, so it won’t do either of us much good.”

“I know a pointless endeavor when I see one,” Draco barked. He waved off his thugs when they took a menacing step forward. For a moment, Draco let his eyes wander over Dazai’s frame, assessing. Dazai wondered just what the other boy was looking for. “You’ve been at the library a lot lately.” He observed idly after a moment.

“I like it here. Sometimes it’s quiet. And I like it when Boss comes to visit me~”

Draco ground his teeth together and averted his gaze to the side. “You know, if you put half as much effort into your practice as you do into researching... whatever it is you’re always looking into, then you’d be casting whatever spells we throw at you.”

“You mean with the Loyalty Club?” He teased, brows wiggling.

“It’s not a club. For Merlin’s sake, Dazai.”

Really, it was more of a bootcamp, but the peeved look on Draco’s face was worth the extra hassle. Speaking of clubs, maybe Dazai should invite Professor Quirrell to join. That guy was just as interested in Dazai figuring out magic as the rest of these brats were. Maybe they’d get along, bonding over tormenting him and making his poor wand hand ache.

Although Quirrell was probably involved in the whole Halloween fiasco in an unsavory way so... maybe that wasn’t a great idea.

“Aw... I’ve always wanted to be a part of a club, though.”

There was the click of Draco snapping his tongue on the roof of his mouth, followed by a pretentious scoff. “If it were a club—which it isn’t, and never will be—you would actually have to show up to be a member. It’s been five days, aren’t you better yet?”

Ah. Dazai’s eyes ached in silent answer, still bearing the burn of all the nullifying he’d done yesterday during Quirrell’s lessons. Being in Hogwarts all this time had made the constant

sting of No Longer Human a bit slighter, if only because there was so much magic around that Dazai had grown used to the headache. After the troll, and the lessons with Slytherin, and the lesson with Quirrell, now, the effort was starting to stack up again.

But that wasn't really what Draco was asking about. Whether he knew it or not, Draco was asking an entirely different question.

He beamed. "Did you miss having me around?" The look Draco gave him was answer enough, so Dazai added, "Quirrell is going to keep me busy with lessons for a while." He gestured to the book laid out in front of him. "Actually, you two have pretty similar teaching styles. Have you considered a teaching career, Boss?"

Literally—was there any way to teach magic aside from keep casting for hours on end and hope something happened? Because Dazai was starting to doubt there was.

Maybe he was just getting unlucky in the mentor department.

"I'll have you know; my father is a very important public figure. Naturally I'll be following in his footsteps."

"Naturally." Dazai said, mentally rolling his eyes.

We're kind of the same like that, Dazai wanted to say, but held his tongue. Explaining the mafia to Draco was... a bit more than he was willing to put up with. Dazai shrugged, rerouting the conversation. "I suppose we can play *Wingardium Leviosa* out by the Forbidden Forest again, since you're so desperate without me. I don't have another meeting with Professor Quirrell until tomorrow."

He tried not to feel too pleased with the affronted look Draco wore. Dazai hid his smirk by turning back to his borrowed textbook.

Dazai was only aware that Draco was reading over his shoulder when the other snake read off in a muttering voice, "*It is only after the harshest of frosts that it can produce truly sweet berries."* Malfoy's brows scrunched together, and he blinked. "What in the hell are you reading?"

"Wouldn't you like to know~" Dazai hummed, waving his fingers whimsically before snapping the book shut. A cloud of dust plumed out from the yellowed pages. "Ah, just kidding." He shot a blank smile Draco's way when the other boy glowered. "I was looking into wand making, but it's all so boring. I don't know why I bothered."

"Right..." Draco huffed. He turned to the two loyal dogs behind him, both of whom jolted to attention eagerly. "Crabbe, Goyle, you can go now."

They shared a look that was just as bumbling as anything else they did. "Are you sure—"

"Yes, now get out." He practically hissed the words. Neither Crabbe nor Goyle wasted another second before following his commands, though both shot Dazai a not-at-all hidden

glare. Once they were out of sight, Draco turned back to Dazai, a grin splitting his face. “They’re good at following commands, but they won’t do us any good to keep around.”

Blinking, Dazai made a noncommittal noise. “Wait,” He frowned. “Keep around... where are we going?”

“We’re going to practice your spells, obviously.” Draco nodded, matter-of-fact. “You’re feeling better now.”

“I am? Right now?”

“Oh,” Draco said suddenly, interrupting his own bombastic tirade to rustle around in his cloak. “Blaise wanted me to give you this.”

Blinking in mystification once again, Dazai took what Draco was holding out. He squinted down at it. “You’re running errands for Blaise now?”

It was an apple. Shiny and red. Dazai’s stomach turned.

“Only today, since I’m feeling so generous.” The blonde gave him a particular look, “Besides, he didn’t really ask so much as shove it in my hands when I said I was going to fetch you.”

“Ah... Blaise can be pretty persuasive when he wants to be.” Dazai hummed. He rubbed the apple off on his cloak, shining the side a pearly red. “To think that Draco would do that without even one pompous-sounding remark... I’m not sure I buy it, in the end.”

He clicked his tongue. Still, Draco didn’t look especially upset with the remark. There was always something calculating in his gaze just below the surface. Draco would be someone to watch out for, Dazai thought, if the boy ever seriously wanted something.

“Hurry up and eat your apple already. I went through all the effort to bring it over here for you, after all.”

“Can I do that, in the library?” He asked innocently. The apple was heavy and light in his hands at the same time.

Draco only rolled his eyes. “Since when have you cared about rules? Just eat it on the way to the training grounds.”

“Training grounds... don’t say that like it’s a real thing.” Dazai snorted. Retrieving the book from where he’d left it shut on the table, Dazai pushed past Draco to slot it into a random spot on a nearby shelf. He was sure a boring book like that wouldn’t go amiss if it was shelved wrong. A glance at Draco didn’t suggest otherwise, either.

“Good.” Draco nodded. This time, he took the lead, guiding an amused Dazai out of the library. Dazai waved amicably at Madam Pince as he trailed after his ‘boss’ like the obedient dog he was. Madam Pince looked up from her own book and offered him a tight smile.

Draco lead with the confidence of someone who would rather die than not be leading. “Now start eating. If you pass out today, I’ll never speak with you again.”

“What a hefty price!” Dazai joked.

…It kind of was though—no one in Slytherin except for Draco and company tolerated his presence. Dazai was still a little unclear on just how far that hate went, but he wasn’t optimistic. He was pretty sure Crabbe and Goyle would attack him if Draco wasn’t around to keep them in line. Regardless, Dazai felt a smile prickling at his lips. “I’ll be on my best behavior then.”

Looking pleased with himself, Draco merely smirked.

Dazai took up the spot behind Draco rather than beside him, which made it infinitely easier to toss the apple into a nearby potted plant without being noticed. When Malfoy shot him a backwards glance half-way to the training grounds, Dazai smiled serenely. He locked his hands behind his back.

It wasn’t until they were crossing the grassy field that Draco spoke up again. “Speaking of wands,” he hummed, “Have you considered that your wand is broken? Surely wandless accidental magic can’t be all that you can do.”

“No.” Dazai shivered against a sudden gust of wind and waved to the blurry figure of Blaise and Pansy in the distance. “Ollivander made it special for me, after all.” At that, Draco’s brows rose up in something like surprise. Dazai continued, regardless. “Boss has been right since the very start: I’m just useless. The only way to escape my worthless existence would be to just die already!”

“Even for a muggleborn, you *are* quite inept.” Draco conceded.

“Exactly! So you’re in agreement I should die. Could you tell Mori that for me? Because he’s always trying to foil my attempts—”

Blaise cleared his throat. “What are we talking about?”

“Nothing.” Dazai and Draco said at the same time. They spoke in drastically different tones, but that was neither here nor there.

As Dazai began to reach around inside his bookbag, Blaise’s eyes wandered over his frame. Whatever he saw, the other boy only nodded sedately. Dazai pulled out his wand and gave it a few experimental flicks, then glanced back to Draco.

Time for another exciting lesson.

Dazai would never say it out loud—at least, not seriously—but he didn’t exactly hate these meetings. On occasion, he even found Pansy’s grating presence to be enjoyable. More recently, with his new knowledge of magic theory, feeling his fellow Slytherins cast spells had been distantly entertaining. Knowing—feeling—how magic worked put Dazai in the unique position of being well on his way to understanding just about everything at Hogwarts.

And until he knew the true relationship between abilities and magic, Dazai wasn't going to let any magical observations slip him by. Even if that meant talking with Pansy and Draco.

Blaise was okay, though.

"Are you just going to stand there all day?" Pansy's voice was as horrid as ever. "I can't believe you still haven't managed even one spell yet. It's been ages."

"He's just a slow learner." Draco interrupted, listless. He sat down on the grass and yawned against the chilled wind. Winter would be here soon. "Besides, I owe it to him to make him semi-functional. He'll be more useful that way, anyway."

"Yeah, yeah," Dazai whined. He cast a half-hearted and entirely unsuccessful *Wingardium Leviosa* towards Pansy's bookbag.

"Not that I think you'll cast anything successfully, but keep your wand away from my things, will you?"

Dazai grinned. He raised his wand and pointed it directly at her, "Maybe I'll just float you away."

She rolled her eyes, clearly expecting him to fail. Pansy wasn't incorrect, of course, but she *was* annoying. "Sure thing, Mr. Remedial Lessons."

"Boss! Pansy is bullying me!"

Draco raised a brow, looking between the two of them with a faintly amused smirk painted on his pale face. "*Can* you levitate her?"

"Absolutely not."

"Well, there you go." Then, after a pause, Draco added. "Give it a shot."

Pansy shrieked in outrage. She drew herself upright, but couldn't seem to decide who to direct her glare at. In the end, it was Dazai who was on the receiving end.

Dazai wiggled his wand at her, beaming from ear-to-ear.

Her revulsion at Draco's suggestion, of course, was entirely unwarranted. At the end of the day, this wand was nothing more than a finely crafted stick in Dazai's hands.

"Don't you dare—"

"Ah, but Boss asked me to!" Laughing, Dazai swished his wand through the air directly at Pansy. Then, with a shit-eating grin, he called, *"Wingardium Leviosa!"*

Pansy didn't levitate. The magic in the air didn't move.

But something did.

No one else seemed to notice. He certainly hadn't cast the spell, but it had felt, faintly, as if something had happened. Like the vague feeling of magic shifting but… *not*. No Longer Human writhed aimlessly and Dazai's stomach twisted in protest as a wave of dizziness and nausea rolled through his body. Across the field, Blaise caught his wary gaze with a raised brow and the curious tilt of his head.

Dazai let out a breath. While the strange feeling in the air seemed to fade, the tightness in his head and stomach did not.

He was just tired. Maybe he should have eaten that apple, after all.

"You're an idiot." Pansy said.

Dazai beamed. "Well, that was never really under question, was it?"

Certainly that was what he had felt.

...right?

Chapter End Notes

so so so sorry about the late update! my internet has been out since tuesday,, i'm actually at the library right now to post this oof

thanks for reading and commenting! y'all are the best!!
next update: ????? sometime between saturday and monday, depending on if i get internet back anytime soon

Magic!

Chapter Summary

Dazai tries to practice his hobby of getting sick and passing out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was, in fact, quite a bit that went into a good lie. For instance, saying, “I’m going to kill myself,” was only a believable distraction if you actually wanted to kill yourself. As a principle, Dazai was always willing to kill himself. This made lying about it especially easy. Other reliable lies included, “I’m not feeling well,” or, “I don’t have time.”

Dazai didn’t think Mori was going to believe any of those, though.

There wasn’t any believable or kind way to write, “I don’t want to deal with you,” so Dazai didn’t write anything at all.

Instead, he wandered the halls of Hogwarts. Professor Quirrell would be seeing him soon, but until then Dazai was too wound up to lay around and wait. Thinking about Mori wouldn’t do him any good. He was certain that the annoying doctor wouldn’t have any information for him, so there wasn’t much point in asking. The most he could do might be to ask for drugs—something to help him with his headaches and the more recent dizzy spells.

Dazai didn’t get sick, of course. He existed in a general state of perfect health, much to his annoyance. But he wasn’t deluded enough to pretend he wasn’t feeling different. It was a whole week after killing the troll before Dazai had started to feel better and he had thought *that was that.* No Longer Human had calmed down, his energy had been restored, and he’d even started eating a little (only when Blaise was watching, of course).

But it was getting worse again, somehow. During his lesson with Quirrell on Wednesday, Dazai had three dizzy spells before the professor finally let him go for the evening.

The first wave of nausea from when Dazai had tried to *Wingardium Leviosa* Pansy into space had faded quickly, but now they were rising up all the time. It had only gotten worse since. Hell—in McGonagall’s class the other day “trying” to cast a transfiguration spell had nearly knocked him out! Blaise had frowned concernedly over him the whole class, clearly suspecting Dazai wasn’t well when he had to sit down half-way through the hands-on lesson. The other snake had been piling more and more food onto his plates ever since, too. Dazai was already kind of annoyed with this new Protective Blaise, even if the other boy did make a good subordinate.

Just thinking about it quirked Dazai’s lips into a smile.

But not for long. He really needed to get to the bottom of why he was suddenly so lightheaded before digging further into anything else—that included the Quirrell mystery. If Dazai nearly passed out every time he was "practicing" magic, he'd never be well long enough to investigate anything fun.

It was, curiously, only when he tried to cast a spell that his stomach would fold in on itself. Dazai still wasn't sure what that meant. Was he just becoming more sensitive to nullifying magic?

For today, it just meant he was annoyed. Whatever this was better fix itself out before he had to see Madam Pomfrey next week, because Dazai was only about fifty percent sure she would believe it if he just smiled wordlessly through their meeting. Doctors were too perceptive for their own good.

Damn. He was back on Mori again.

Maybe if he could finally convince Ron to take his owl, then Dazai wouldn't have to ever send a letter back. Mori would have to accept that, one way or another. With a resigned sigh, Dazai hunched over slightly and skirted around a corner. With his luck, he'd just have a new owl by the end of the month, anyway.

He felt fine *now,* but after his remedial lesson with Quirrell tonight—

"Mr. Dazai."

—he'd be sick for sure.

Dazai blinked out of his thoughts just in time to not run face-first into Professor Snape's chest.

"Professor," he said dumbly. He'd been so caught up in his musings that Snape had seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. How embarrassing. "Good evening."

Snape's eyes narrowed and he did not return the kind greeting. However, the professor did run his gaze over Dazai's bandaged frame critically—cautiously. And—*oh, right.* Madam Pomfrey had told Snape about his... *habits*. Suddenly, standing under those cold black eyes made the sick little feeling in Dazai's stomach curl.

When Professor Snape spoke, his voice lacked some of the harshness it usually held. That there was any vitriol at all was something of a relief. "Feeling better, are we?" Dazai's lips curled up pleasantly in response, even if it was stretched too thin at the edges.

"I'd be feeling better if you canceled that dragon blood essay due next week, Sir."

Raising a brow, Professor Snape only watched as Dazai took a step back. "Certainly, you have the time to write one essay, considering you've never done an assignment to date."

"Ah," Dazai started, turning away to laugh. "That's mean! I really am busy, you know."

“Insufferable as always, I see.” Snape ground out, “I expect it’s useless to attempt to persuade you to do your assignments. Though judging by your... *performance* in my class, perhaps it’s for the best I never see your work.”

“Kind as ever, Sir.” Dazai mimicked cleanly. He snorted, then bounced back on his heels. “Was there something you needed, professor?” Being watched like this... it was just as bad as when Pomfrey stared down his arms and said useless things about malnutrition. Just as bad as when the twins rushed him off to the infirmary. He couldn’t decide how to feel about it, really.

The professor merely grit his teeth. After a moment, he seemed to decide on what to say; when he did, it was with a careful voice. “All of your classes are done for the day. Go back to your dorm. Surely one of your friends is there.”

“I wouldn’t call them my friends,” Dazai answered back reflexively.

“So long as they aren’t bulling you, I suspect you should count your blessings, boy.”

Ah—that was very accurate. Still, a bit disconcerting that Snape was aware of Dazai’s precarious position in Hogwarts and hadn’t tried to step in yet. Although he supposed the fact that Slytherin was mostly full of pure-blood supremacists was just as well-known as Dazai’s being muggleborn was. There wasn’t much to be done except to play politics, after all. Dazai smiled. “Maybe.” At the very least, he trusted Blaise. “But I’m not just wandering around! And Fred and George aren’t with me, so you know I’m not getting up to any trouble.”

Snape seemed to pause at that. “That is an... *unfortunate friendship.”*

Dazai nodded, spurred on by the reaction. He was well aware of the numerous pranks Professor Snape had been victim to; he’d planned a few of them himself, even. “Besides, I still have a class tonight. I’m only... a little turned around.” *No surprise there.*

“ Galivanting around campus with Mr. Malfoy, Ms. Parkinson, and Mr. Zabini does not constitute a class.” Snape’s gaze caught on his bandaged arms. Damn.

“Ah... you know about that?”

“I am not the idiot you take me for, Mr. Dazai.”

He half chuckled and shook his head. At the movement, Dazai’s curly, chocolate bangs hung over into his eyes—they were starting to get too long. “You’re plenty smart, Sir.” *Just a bit of a stick in the mud.* Letting out a melodramatic sigh, Dazai willed himself to deflate a bit. *“* I really am turned around, you know. Aren't you going to help me out?” *And stop watching me like that.*

Snape’s eyes immediately snapped away from the bandages wrapping around Dazai’s neck as if he had heard the unspoken words there. The professor cleared his throat. “I suppose I could walk you back to your dorm room. We should...” Snape paused, and the words behind his throat seemed to fight him, “... *talk.”*

" I still have class." Dazai echoed, making his voice firm in a way that suggested, *no—they would not be talking about what Pomfrey had said under any circumstances.* I was going to show up late just to make Professor Quirrell sweat, but," *I don't want to be interrogated by you,* "in the end, I'm feeling generous."

Snape snapped to attention. He stared silently at Dazai for a second before his whole posture became very serious. Dazai felt himself tense up in anticipation. "You have an extra class with Professor Quirrell?"

Dazai blinked.

"Did you not know?" Hadn't Quirrell said he'd spoken with the other professors about the remedial lessons? "He has himself convinced that he can teach me magic where everyone else has failed. Maybe he'll let me off early tonight if I tell him I'm feeling sick..."

But Dazai's cheery musings didn't lighten the weight of Snape's stoic expression. Without warning, the potions master grabbed each of Dazai's shoulders with white-knuckled hands. Dazai tensed up horribly, his entire body going stock still at the unexpected pressure of being held in place. And Snape's eyes— Dazai had been right, Quirrell was definitely trouble.

And the other professors knew about it. To the point of visible panic lighting Snape's usually dark eyes up.

Huh.

Snape seemed to notice immediately how Dazai had frozen beneath his touch, because he withdrew his grasp and took a step back a second later. The mafioso was sure that his face was bleached white, as well. Snape let out a tight breath. " *How long*," his voice was low, "exactly have you been meeting with him?"

"Only a week." Dazai answered, his breath carefully still. He could still feel the impression of Professor Snape's hands on his shoulders. "Sir."

There was something odd in Snape's expression that Dazai couldn't quite place. "These remedial lessons... what has he been teaching you?"

Dazai narrowed his eyes and tried to control his breathing. There was no time to fuss over these silly little reactions of his—the panic at being touched unexpectedly, the fear of talking about his cuts and eating habits. He needed to focus on the *now.* On what Professor Snape knew about Quirrell and, subsequently, the mountain troll from Halloween. He needed to focus on that, because if he didn't, Dazai would start nervously scratching at his arms again.

And *that* had turned out so great last time.

"Magic, mostly. I haven't managed any spells yet though." Dazai replied evenly. Watching Snape carefully, Dazai could see the way the professor was trying to hide the way he bit his lip. Dazai tried to recall how Professor Snape had reacted when they'd run into Quirrell at the Leaky Cauldron, but couldn't differentiate one expression from the other. Casually, he inquired, "What's the matter, Sir?"

The muted question seemed to startle Snape from his thoughts, and he didn't appear to realize the innocent manipulation in Dazai's question. He was just a hurt kid to Snape, after all. Pomfrey had made sure of that. Still, when the potion master sighed, he wasn't relenting so much as walling himself off.

Whatever secrets Professor Quirrell had hidden away... Dazai had sniffed them out, sure, but it was clearly a much bigger ordeal than he had thought.

"Remedial lessons..." Snape said after a moment, "Be careful not to strain yourself, boy."

All of the panic in Snape's voice had completely melted away. Instead, it was now masked behind that careless expression once again. Whatever Snape was thinking, he wasn't going to tell Dazai about it.

"I'm working on it." Dazai replied semi-honestly.

Snape nodded, not at all looking reassured. He spared a way glance around the halls, but they were empty except for a few onlooking paintings. "I need to speak with the Headmaster immediately. But I suppose I could walk you to your... *lesson."*

" Oh? Thanks, Mister!"

He nodded, stern, then immediately set off in the direction Dazai had originally come from without so much as a glance to see if his student was following. Dazai had to half-run the first few steps to catch up. He spared a sideways glance to Snape as they walked.

Tense. That's probably how he'd describe a look like that. It should fill Dazai with dread, but it just made him a bit eager, instead. He always loved a good mystery.

As they walked, neither student nor professor spoke. Dazai didn't want to be the first to break the silence, even though he desperately wanted to as what had the Hogwarts staff so wary of Professor Quirrell. After all, they shouldn't have the natural instincts of a mafia dog to sniff out fellow monsters. Had they pieced it together from the troll alone?

…that didn't seem right.

He'd already jarred Professor Snape too much to push now. And Dazai was pleased enough with not having to talk about his trip to the infirmary that he didn't feel the need to press further. Smiling aimlessly, Dazai ignored the watchful gazes of other students on him as Snape escorted him to the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. Once they arrived, however, Professor Snape seemed to hesitate.

Before Dazai could reach out to open the door, Snape asked, "Behave yourself, Mr. Dazai."

"Always, Sir." Dazai laughed. It was a lie, of course, but Professor Snape didn't look annoyed in the slightest. He was still wearing that tense look, like he wanted to trap Dazai beneath his hands once again. Like he didn't want Dazai to enter Quirrell's classroom.

Smiling, Dazai tried not to look too pleased with closing the door on Snape's face.

He whirled on his feet with a large, pasted-on grin. It wouldn't do to give off the impression that he just had the strangest conversation with Snape about his remedial lessons... not yet, at least. Quirrell was blinking owlishly at him from behind his desk, as if his sudden entrance had startled him out of something important. Dazai watched his professor frantically tuck in the edges of his turban.

"Professor Quirrell! I'm here for my lesson."

"A-ah," he stumbled, "I s-see that, Mr. Dazai. Y-y-you're certainly... eager. Was that... S-severus Snape with you?"

Dazai hummed, rolling back on his heels. "He was nice enough to show me the way after I got lost." Then, smiling vaguely, he added, "Though I think he just wanted the excuse to yell at me about potions."

"R-right." Quirrell said, haltingly. *There was something there, for sure.* He shot a sideways glance at the front door. When Snape didn't enter behind Dazai, Professor Quirrell smiled in the sort of untrustworthy way he always did. Dazai smiled too, and it was of the same ilk. "H-have you been practicing the v-v-verdimilious charm since W-wednesday?"

"Nope~!" Even if Dazai had seen any merit in doing something like that, it would have just made him sick to try. When Professor Quirrell started to speak again, Dazai pulled his wand from his book bag.

"Wh-what you need is, p-perhaps, a bit of motivation. Try for me now?"

Dazai nodded. His wand was as pristine and useless as ever, but now when he raised it into the air, it *also* gave him a stomachache. Holding back a grimace, Dazai decided that after suffering through another lesson, he'd have no choice but to write to Mori asking for medicine. He would never get *anything* done if he was always on the verge of throwing up.

But even before the charm left his mouth, a wave of vertigo rocked through Dazai's body. It felt like his insides were rearranging themselves, moving around, changing shape—

"*Verdimilious!"*

A tiny, green light flickered to life at the end of Dazai's wand.

Then he threw up.

Chapter End Notes

dazai: i have remedial lessons with quirrell
snape: aksljdf
dazai: interesting. tell me more

i remember this chapter being kind of clunky, but i really can't be bothered
my internet is back! so we'll be back to our regular Saturday updates now, at least until i invariably run out of buffer chapters
Thanks for reading and commenting! ILY!

Conflict of Interest

Chapter Summary

Dazai stops his subordinates from killing one another with the power of friendship.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"This is the second time in the last seven days that you've been in the infirmary!" Draco's incessant barking was somewhere between annoyed and concerned. Dazai simply nodded along mindlessly. It probably would be rude to correct Draco with, *it's actually three times,* right?

"What can I say," he intoned, returning a quill back to his book bag. Dazai looked away from his most recent letter to Mori—he'd have to send that later today. "I'm a busy guy."

"That's not—!" Draco droned on, and Dazai zoned him out. Instead of listening, he quickly skimmed over his letter once more.

"*Mori,*

Winter break is coming up and I'd like to stay here. I promise I won't try to kill myself this time.

I cast a spell yesterday. I'd like to keep practicing spells while I'm on campus. Apparently, spell casting off campus is forbidden, but I need to know the extent of this development. I'll instruct the owl not to hide dead things in your office if you give me a straight reply for once.

Dazai."

It was good. Well, as good as it was going to get. He'd never been able to lie to Mori. In the end, there wasn't a point to trying to hide the truth from that man, so he would just outright say it: the nullifier had cast a spell. One thing that still stuck out to him was Mori's confidence that Dazai would find a place at Hogwarts. Had the man *known* he would figure out how to use magic despite No Longer Human?

How?

Dazai was still reeling from what had happened. The dizziness, the nausea, even his passing out a week ago—was it all connected to the fact that he successfully cast Verdimilious? He needed more information—needed those books on special abilities that didn't seem to exist here.

He needed to stay on campus and test the limits of this revelation.

“Oi, are you listening to me?”

Dazai shook himself out of his thoughts, folding up the letter and slipping it into his bag before glancing up tiredly to see Draco’s pinched face. “Define listening.”

“Hey—!”

“Are you okay?”

Both Draco and Dazai turned away from each other just in time to see Blaise crossing through the common room’s threshold. He tilted his chin up at the passive smile Dazai was wearing by way of answer, then glanced to Draco instead. “What did he do this time?”

“*Apparently,”* Draco grumbled, leaning back into his seat with a *thump*, “this idiot overworked himself *again.”*

“I threw up on Professor Quirrell.” Dazai clarified cheerfully.

“You what.”

“Well,” he flapped a hand around lazily, “*near* him. But there really isn’t that much difference, is there? Anyway, Madam Pomfrey said I was using more magic than I could handle and that I should take a break.”

Blaise raised a brow. “But..?”

“But I want to practice more. And I’ve never actually listened to a thing she’s said before, so why start now?”

Draco scoffed. “*You* want to practice?”

Nodding, Dazai decided a little truth couldn’t hurt. “You know that I’ve been practicing with Professor Quirrell lately.” The name tasted sticky on his tongue. “We made some progress.”

Blaise had the decency to keep his expression flat, but Draco’s immediately morphed into shock.

“Don’t look so surprised. Even I can do something right *occasionally.”*

“ It’s been almost three months of daily practice.” Blaise countered casually. He ran an assessing gaze up-and-down Dazai’s figure, before nodding. “And you haven’t cast a single successful spell. It *is* a bit surprising. What spell was it?”

“Verdimilious.” Dazai said with a sideways glance to Draco. “But I need my dear, dear Boss to help me with all the other spells! Since he’s much better than Quirrell. Or something.”

Draco clicked his tongue. “Don’t *or something* me—”

“But Professor Quirrell isn’t a pure blood like you, right? So clearly you’re the better teacher.” Leaning back in his chair, Dazai let his head flop to the side. Blaise looked down at him with an accommodating quirk of his brow. “See? I do listen.”

“...sometimes.” But Dazai could see the hidden twitch of Draco’s lips into a smile. It was as easy as ever, manipulating Draco. Not that he couldn’t just run off and practice spells by himself, but there was something almost pleasant about bringing the club with him.

He’d never say that aloud, of course. The look Blaise was given him, though... Dazai wasn’t sure the other snake wasn’t reading the thoughts right out of his head.

“Alright, fine.” Draco said with a sigh that wasn’t at all as peeved-sounding as he’d probably intended. “We can practice spells today. I already have my homework done anyway.” He looked away, amused. “And I know a lost cause when I see one, so I won’t ask if you’ve finished any of your assignments. Blaise?”

He shrugged. “I’ll come with. My homework can wait.”

“Ah~ Is Blaise taking after me now? You should keep up with your studies if you want to succeed in life!” Dazai chastised in a voice, not at all dissimilar to Hermione’s.

“I’m bringing snacks.” The mafioso’s mouth immediately snapped shut. “And you’re going to eat something on the way to the training grounds, otherwise you won’t be practicing.”

He balked. “Huh? You can’t just make up rules like that, don’t be so stupid, Blaise.”

Looking to Draco for assurance only revealed the Malfoy to be nodding along in obvious agreement. “That’s a good idea. Food will help keep your energy up. We can’t have you passing out again. Or...” His lip curled. “*throwing up* on anyone... Actually, are you *sure* you’re well enough for this?”

“Nope!”

He paused. After a second of blank staring, Draco sighed, looking deeply resigned. “...Just don’t puke on me.”

Dazai nodded, emphatic.

Draco, clearly nonplussed, got to his feet. He stretched an arm over his head before the tension lining his body collapsed itself. “Let’s get going now, then. I’m not waiting around for you to change your mind.” Taking initiative, Draco snatched Dazai’s bookbag from the floor. He was about to swing it over his shoulder when he must have realized the implications of carrying his *subordinate’s* bag. Draco tossed it into Blaise’s chest instead.

“Thanks.” Blaise intoned, immediately dropping the book bag onto Dazai’s lap. Dazai took it in stride, rising to his feet with the bag clutched to his stomach.

“Blaise,” Draco nodded. His voice was serious in an *I’m better than you* type of way as he delegated. “Go fetch us some snacks from the kitchens, would you? You can meet us down by the training grounds.” Almost as an afterthought, he added, “Bring Pansy if you find her.”

Glancing sideways to Dazai before replying, Blaise hummed. “Whatever.”

He didn’t put up any fuss except to amble out of the Slytherin common rooms. Blaise was certainly the type to just do whatever he wanted, and Dazai was sure the boy would have gone to get snacks even if Draco had turned him down. In the end, he wondered if Draco didn’t know that Blaise wasn’t loyal to him in the slightest. Blaise was loyal to himself, and that was that.

Well... maybe he was loyal to Dazai, too. He tried not to feel too pleased with that.

“Are you coming?” Draco snapped, pulling Dazai’s from his musings. The platinum-haired snake was glaring at him amicably (somehow) from a few feet away.

“Ah, actually, Boss... He’ll be a while, won’t he?”

Draco blinked, then squinted down at Dazai. “I guess. *Why?”*

He laughed lightly. “Don’t sound so suspicious!” Dazai pulled the bag up and around his head, then patted it twice. “I was just wondering if I had time to walk Mori’s letter over to the owlery.” *Best not to stall any longer than he already had.* “I was supposed to send it yesterday.”

For a moment, Dazai was certain he would be shot down. After all, if *he* was the boss here (in some ways, he was), he’d tell Draco where to shove it and then maybe break one of his fingers for speaking out of turn. Nothing like a little pain to put a subordinate in place.

Well... that was *mafia* boss rules. That sort of thing didn’t really apply to Hogwarts, did it? Regardless, he was still caught off guard when self-centered, pompous Draco merely nodded along in agreement.

“You shouldn’t put off your duties.” He said, self-assured, “A *pure wizard* like myself would never neglect to send a missive on time. Especially if it were to my father!”

“I was in the infirmary, but okay.”

Draco spoke over him. “I suppose we have time. Since I’m feeling so generous today, I’ll walk with you so you don’t get lost.”

Taking the unexpectedly easy agreement in stride, Dazai merely grinned. He plodded up to the door, following Draco out with a fake-sounding string of gratitudes on his lips. Almost immediately, Draco took the lead. Dazai bounced after him like a baby duckling. He was eager to get to practicing spells, but he supposed Draco was right: correspondence with Mori would always take precedence. How boring.

They walked mostly in silence—Draco's condescension often inspired silence in others. Not that Dazai bothered with that sort of thing outside of the mafia, but he held his tongue for now. Yesterday’s revelation was still buzzing around noisily in his brain.

Magic.

Him.

It just didn't make sense! He had never managed a spell before—No Longer Human was proof enough of that. So why could he cast Verdimilious at all?

And why *now?*

Dazai spared a sideways glance to Draco, but the other snake's shock had entirely faded. Draco didn't have the full picture. Sure, it was surprising that Slytherin's least favorite idiot had finally managed a spell, but Draco didn't know that even that much should be *literally impossible.* And it *had been* impossible. Up until yesterday, at least.

Draco must have caught him looking, because when Dazai blinked out of his thoughts, the boy was watching him with a raised brow. Dazai glanced away passively, feeling put-on-the-spot even though Draco couldn't have possibly known what he had been thinking about.

"What."

"Ah," Dazai smiled. He ran a hand through the hair at the base of his neck. "Just thinking about my newest idea for suicide!"

Draco's expression immediately morphed into quiet annoyance and he dismissed, "Never mind."

Too easy. Dazai shrugged mentally. Out of spite for something, he started walking just a step faster until Draco had to speed up as well in order to stay ahead. It wasn't long before they were at the owlery. Stepping past Draco, Dazai forced his way in before the other snake.

As usual, the place was a mess. There were bones littering the floor and feathers strewn about the windows and caught in the air. It was chilly here now that the seasons had turned. With how the windows hung open at all hours of the day and night, the wind whistled noisily around the tower. Dazai shivered. Perhaps startled by their entrance, dozens of owl eyes shot to Dazai, then tracked his movement up the tower. He ignored them. Dazai scanned the birds watching him, looking for the one familiar owl among them. A shine of dark feathers caught his attention, and Dazai turned to his owl.

Featherbrain wasn't alone.

A familiar red-head of hair was hovering over the bird and petting her feathers. When Dazai halted, the scuff of his shoe alerted Ron to his presence.

"Oh," Ron jumped slightly, clearly not having expected someone to interrupt him. In all fairness, Dazai hadn't expected to see Ron here either. This was... *unfortunate.* Still, Dazai grinned. "Finally come to take care of her?" Ron gestured to Featherbrain, who was picking at where his hand had stopped petting.

The echo of steps following up the stairs indicated Draco wasn't all that far behind. What was there to do when your two friends hated each other? Should he convince Draco to leave now, before spotting the *blood traitor*?

The utter bastard in Dazai kind of wanted to see what would happen if the two really had a chance to interact.

The part of him that wanted to start a gang, however, wondered if keeping his subordinates from killing one another was a better move.

Truly, a conundrum.

“Something like that,” he said instead, smiling emptily. “I have to deliver a letter. Featherbrain, get over here!”

The dark-feathered owl fluttered over to him without hesitation—a fact that drew a peeved look to Ron’s face. Dazai didn’t waste time in pulling the letter from his bag and tying it to Featherbrain’s talon. He was just sending it into flight with a feathery flap of two wings when Draco finally made his entrance.

“Dazai! What’s taking so long—”

You could tell the exact moment Draco realized that they had a guest by the accompanying scowl quickly replacing amusement on his face. Ron’s expression did something distinctly similar. They locked eyes just over Dazai’s head.

“You didn’t tell me that *blood traitor* was here.”

Ron bristled. “At least *my family* isn’t a bunch of Death Eaters!”

Dazai saw how those words had briefly paralyzed Draco. He was watching the exchange warily. It wasn’t a second before Draco was barking back more insults. “Well aren’t *you* full of yourself.” He took a step closer to Ron, pushing past Dazai thoughtlessly, “For someone who can’t even cast *Wingardium Leviosa* properly, that is.”

Sneering, Ron fingers twitched over the air behind him. Dazai’s eyes narrowed. “I can cast it better than you can, mate.”

Draco stuck his nose out. “Typical Gryffindor, always thinking they're better than everyone else. Come on, Dazai. It’s best not to stay in the presence of someone like *that* for too long.”

“He’s not your *pet,* Malfoy. Dazai doesn't have to just do whatever you tell him!”

Dazai saw it before Draco did, but the blonde was still fast. Ron withdrew his wand with a glare in his eyes and a flash of his teeth. Before Ron’s mouth had even opened to form a spell on his tongue, Draco’s own wand was poised to attention.

They were going to charm one another. This is what Hogwarts got for giving magically charged wands to twelve-year-olds—the second they started bickering, sparks were flying. And really, all this in-fighting was no good. You couldn't have a gang that was always at odds with itself.

Ron's wand was quick to point, and Draco's fast to return.

But Dazai was faster.

"*Wingardium Leviosa!"*

The dizziness hit him first, then the sickness, and *then* the awareness that both Draco and Ron were held perfectly still about two inches off the ground.

"What—!?"

Draco's eyes shot around the room frantically, probably shocked that someone had managed to pull a spell off on him. It wasn't until he reached Ron that he could see the Weasley himself was *also* being held aloft.

It only lasted for a second, though, before Dazai's spell lost its influence. He felt the magic slip through his fingers formlessly. It dripped off of his wand and pounded behind his eyes. The two dumbstruck wizards dropped to the ground with a snap of heel on cobblestone. Ron and Draco locked eyes for only a second before turning just in time to watch Dazai plummet to the floor, too.

"Dazai!"

"Hey!"

They both rushed to his side without a moment of hesitation. Dazai tried to catch their expressions, but his vision was spotty and black around the edges. He wasn't aware of anything outside of the sickness roiling in his stomach until a hand settled on his back.

"Are you *okay?"*

Ron—that was Ron's voice. Dazai pushed himself up somewhat. "Just great." He tried to smile, but sure how successful the endeavor was. "Only a little dizzy."

Dizzy... try nauseous as all hell.

But it had *worked.* For just a second, Dazai's spell had lifted them off the ground. It wasn't as powerful as what they could do in class (which was, you know, actually lifting things more than an inch off the ground) and it *certainly* wasn't as easy (read: not passing out). But it had *worked—* It hadn't been just a fluke yesterday.

Dazai could use magic.

Just barely. But he could *do* it.

" Help me sit him up."

"I'm not working with some lousy Slytherin!"

Dazai trapped a keening whine in his throat when the room spun. They must have seen it on his face, anyway.

"*Fine,"* Ron grumbled after a pause. The hand on Dazai's back slipped away for a second. A moment later, it was wrapping around his arm. "But I'm not doing it because *you* said to."

A hiss sounded from somewhere to Dazai's right. His vision was just starting to come back in time to see Draco condescend, "*Obviously."* He ducked under Dazai's arm, supporting half of his weight. "You better not tell anyone about this." Draco growled under his breath.

Ron took up his other side. "You think that I want everyone knowing I worked with you? As if!"

Dazai's insides swirled around as the two boys held him upright. He tried not to groan as a wave of nausea coursed through his veins again. "Wow," his voice quivered weakly, "You two get along great."

"Oi!"

"Shut up, idiot!" Draco hissed. He whirled on Dazai. "I thought you said you were feeling better!"

He made a so-so gesture with his hand and grunted lightly when Ron and Draco set him down on an open window sill. Leaning his weight against the wall, Dazai felt his skin grow wan and clammy. "I don't think that's what I said."

Draco's tongue clicked on the roof of his mouth like he was snapping gum. Both he and Ron were watching over the mafioso with matching tense expressions. Lips pressed together; brows pushed in... Looking between them, Dazai couldn't help but to smile sloppily.

For two people who supposedly couldn't be more different, they both reacted the same way to him falling ill.

Maybe he could make a decent gang out of them yet!

...well, up until they were glaring at each other again.

Dazai's fingers twitched over his wand where his fingers had clasped over it too tightly. He set it down on his lap, then sighed thoughtfully. *Magic...* it still didn't really register to Dazai. No Longer Human was banging around his skull, but it wasn't *nullifying his spells.* Not today, at least.

Damn. He really needed to find that nonexistent book on abilities now.

When Dazai felt his sickness clearing a little, he looked up from his lap. Neither Ron nor Draco was throttling the other, so he counted it as a win.

He chuckled wetly. "Thanks. Or whatever."

"*Or whatever,"* Draco mocked. He poked Dazai's cheek.

"Well, I didn't throw up on you. Consider that my thank-you gift."

“Uh,” Ron was watching them with wide eyes. “Shouldn’t you go to the nurse?”

Draco hissed, “That’s none of your business, *Gryffindor.”*

At the same time, Dazai hummed. “Madam Pomfrey has got to be sick of me by now.”

They shared a brief look that ended when Dazai leaned back to rest his head against the cold stone wall. He smiled lazily, eyes half-lidded. “I’m fine. She may-or-may-not have told me to not practice magic for a week, anyway. I’d rather not have my ear talked off with another lecture.” He blinked. “Do you think this tower is tall enough to kill me if I jumped?”

“You are a *horrible* subordinate.” Draco’s voice was low and growly and *fond.*

“ Thanks, Boss.”

You too, he thought, smiling.

Chapter End Notes

this fic is just a long excuse to write dazai whump

Thanks for reading and commenting! It means a lot :)
Next update is on Saturday!

Just the Four of Us (and Snape and Quirrell)

Chapter Summary

Winter break begins!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Dazai woke up, campus was mostly empty and a brittle cold had settled into the air. He yawned and rubbed at his eyes through the blanket. The thick cloth hung around Dazai's frame. Sitting up, he let it cling to his body, unwilling to lose the heat built up under it.

Blaise's bed was empty, sheets unwrinkled and exact.

Most of the beds were empty.

It was odd—he'd sort of gotten used to how crowded this place was.

He could lie there forever tucked underneath warm blankets. ut in the end, it was the sound of other bedsheets shuffling that forced Dazai to his feet and out of the Slytherin common room.

With winter break starting today, almost everyone had left campus. Going home and visiting family... that just wasn't something Dazai wanted to have a hand in. Luckily, Mori had thought the same. Although knowing the doctor, there was always some ulterior motive to his decisions. It *couldn't* just be that Dazai didn't want to go home. Mori was getting something out of this arrangement, and Dazai's relative freedom was dependent on that fact.

Mori's letter rung in Dazai's head as he mutely shambled to the great hall in a sleepy haze.

"*Dazai,"* The letter read,

"You never take initiative like this! I'm proud, that's so adorable! Consider it my gift to you: as far as your father will ever be aware, Hogwarts doesn't allow for students to return home over the winter break if they live overseas. You should really be more grateful to me, you know. After all I've done for you.

On a related note, I noticed your owl tore up my papers—"

Dazai had stopped reading there.

He was the first one to arrive at the great hall (no surprise there). Sitting, his spine seemed to melt into the bench as he blinked rapidly to clear the sleep from his eyes.

He'd been trying not to think about it. About what Father must be thinking about all this. Avoiding the man through winter was practical for everyone involved: Dazai got to practice his magic, Mori didn't have to patch him up...

But he wouldn't be able to avoid anything over the summer. No way to avoid the trainings, the yelling, the *punishments*. And Dazai would be in for one hell of a punishment, too. After all, had Father even wanted him to go to Hogwarts in the first place?

Maybe he *should* be more grateful to Dr. Mori for that.

Dazai sighed.

"Looking a little worse for wear there, Snakey!"

"Mind if we sit?"

Shaken from his thoughts, Dazai blinked away from the table in time to see Fred and George sit one on each side of him. He smothered a yawn. "What's the point in asking if you're just going to sit anyway?"

Fred hummed. "Well, you wouldn't say no to *us*."

"...Maybe."

The twins beamed. Dazai somehow managed to catch both of their giddy expression despite staring steadfastly at the far wall.

"So," George made a thoughtful noise. Beside him, Fred was helping himself to some toast, "It's just a few of us staying over winter break. We were thinking about inviting you to pull some *particularly* fun pranks with us, but..."

Fred nodded. "You look exhausted. Got a bit of bed head just—" he gestured to all of Dazai, "*there."*

"*Thanks,"* Dazai grumbled, running a hand through his hair. It flopped down over his eyes.

"Is there a reason you're so tired?" George inquired, stealing a strawberry from its dish. "Partying late last night before all of your snake friends left?"

"Practicing*."* Dazai corrected.

"Aww, what happened to all that resolve for not doing any magic?"

He snorted. "That was the plan. But retroactively I've decided to maybe master one spell."

For the past few weeks, Dazai had been spending more and more time split between Quirrell and the Loyalty Club. It was important. But it was also *dreadfully exhausting.* Draco had insisted that they pull back on training sessions, but that only drew Dazai to ask Quirrell for extra lessons. The circumstances of his using magic were too unusual to just ignore, and he'd

be damned if he was going to let a little nausea keep him from exploring his new magical capabilities. At least he wasn't throwing up anymore.

He *was* exhausted, though. If there was even a scrap of energy left in Dazai's bones, it was going straight into practicing spells. Even with all his practice, though, he could barely float things with Wingardium Leviosa. It wasn't for a lack of trying. Whenever he expressed wanted to practice more, Draco and Blaise would fret about him being sick again, but Quirrell would just smile. Dazai didn't trust the professor in the slightest, but he needed a guide to practice magic with and Quirrell was willing. He would take what he could get. In the end, understanding why he could suddenly do magic was more important than figuring out whatever nonsense that troll had been about.

Slumping into the table, Dazai ignored the twin hums going over his head.

"Well," a hand landed on his head, fluffing up his overgrown hair and tucking some stray locks behind his ears, "that's what winter break is for!"

Dazai swatted the hand away.

"Resting up," George said. Fred continued, "pulling pranks."

Practicing magic until I'm sick, Dazai added mentally, *reading until I'm cross-eyed.*

He smiled, sitting up just enough to rest his chin on his fist. "Ron is staying over break too, isn't he?" Dazai deflected easily, "Will he be joining us in our latest prank endeavors?"

"Think you can convince him?"

"Our Ronniekins can be pretty stubborn."

Dazai quirked a brow. He grinned. "I can do anything." Even magic, apparently. That particular thought still tickled him whenever it crossed his mind.

The twins seemed to enjoy that line, giggling between themselves for a moment. Dazai considered them briefly before sitting up again and snatching a blueberry from the table. It didn't really have much of a flavor.

"Hmm..." he hummed absentmindedly, "...we should prank Professor Quirrell."

Fred and George perked up. "We were planning on throwing some snowballs at him, actually! Great minds, and all that!"

"Eh? That's alright, I guess."

Dazai's dull voice died off abruptly as some of the staff began to arrive in the hall. Professor Snape gave him a brief nod before settling into his seat at the head of the room. Beside Snape, Professor McGonagall's eyes seemed to widen at the site of two Gryffindor's chatting amicably with a first-year Slytherin. Rolling his eyes, Dazai turned his attention back to the twins.

“Actually,” he continued, voice subdued now, “I have regular remedial lessons with Professor Quirrell, you know. Maybe I could dig up some dirt on him for you. Do something a bit more exciting than... throwing snow at him.”

To be entirely honest, Dazai wasn’t very familiar with the concept of *snowballs* as a recreational activity. Nor was he entirely sure what a snowball *fight* was, despite seeing a number of students apparently engaged in them on campus in the past few weeks. Dazai currently had it narrowed down to either an act of soft warfare or a tactic to rule out the weak links in a group.

Regardless, Dazai had no desire to dirty his hands with something like that. He let some of that boredom slip onto his face.

The twins looked amused at the prospect. Dazai felt his own eyes light with vague humor in response. He stole another tasteless blueberry from the table.

“I’ll keep you posted.” Dazai smirked, “Speaking of Ron... In the meantime, I have a *great* idea. Could you cast a spell for me?”

“Dazai!” Ron squeaked, “Why are my books *flying?!”*

“I have absolutely no idea.” Dazai lied, smiling passively. “Why do you ask?”

Expression frantic, Ron gestured wildly to where all of his textbooks were flying around the halls in circles over his head. Dazai smothered his smirk below a sloppy pout. The books were flapping their covers as if they were wings. Dazai had to admit, Fred and George were really great friends. They hopped on his idea to animate Ron’s books the second he suggested it. Once he had a better grasp on magic, Dazai would have to ask the twins where they got all of their cool pranking magic from.

“Oh, I hadn’t noticed.”

“You hadn’t noticed?!”

When Ron spun around to try and catch some of his charmed books, Dazai reached out lazily. The moment his finger brushed against its spine, the transfiguration textbook collapsed. He caught it in the palm of his hand. “Nope!” He popped the *P, “* Anyway, stop playing around. I’ve come to invite you to some shenanigans, so listen up.”

“*Playing around—”* Ron whirled on his feet once more. Dazai nearly broke out laughing when he saw the Defense Against the Dark Arts book struggling to take flight between Ron's shaking hands. The ginger blinked, eyes wide with something akin to shock once they had latched on to the textbook in Dazai's hand. “How did you do that?”

“I’m sure that I don’t know what you're talking about.”

“You—! You caught the book!” During that brief moment of distraction, Ron’s captive textbook writhed back out of his grasp. It stuttered away from the red-head and joined its companions in circling overhead like a noisy paper vulture. His eyes narrowed. “Don’t tell me...”

Dazai hummed, innocent.

“*You* charmed them?!”

"How could you suggest something like that? I’m barely capable of using, like... half of one spell. Anyway, listen up.” Dazai nodded self-assuredly over the sound of Ron spluttering. Casually, he collected another book from the sky. It deaminated when he stacked it on top of its brother. It was interesting to feel the charm nullify now that Dazai was learning what to feel for. He drummed his fingers over the covers contemplatively. “You are being formally invited to a prank orchestrated by yours truly. Your brothers are helping, obviously, so it’s bound to be fun. What do you say?”

Ron balked. “Aren’t you pranking me right now?”

“That’s irrelevant.”

“...I’m not sure it is.”

Dazai waved him off. “It’s not like you’re doing anything else over winter break.” He spared a brief glance to the last two books circling overhead. “Well, nothing important.”

A stray book brushed over Ron’s head, but the other boy let it go with a resigned sigh. Dazai beamed. He carefully plucked it from the air. Only one more to go. He *definitely* had to ask the twins what spell they used to do this. Just imagining what Draco’s smug little face would look like when his cauldron would start to walk away...

Priceless.

Ron’s expression was pretty amusing, too. The ginger’s lips were pressed firmly together. “Oi.”

“Aww, come on! Hermione went home for break. She’s not going to pester you about not studying.” Dazai keened. “Don’t be so stubborn, please. I’m trying to incite chaos.”

“I’m not *stubborn,”* Ron grumbled stubbornly. Dazai’s lips twitched. “Just—what do you have planned, exactly?”

“Not sure yet. Something fun, I guess. Have any bright ideas?”

He huffed out an exasperated sigh. Reaching out an open palm, Ron gestured towards his books. Dazai returned the de-animated books to their owner. Now that the charm was satisfactorily nullified, they easily acquiesced to Ron’s tight grip. The mafioso blinked wide and slow in the closest approximation to puppy-dog eyes Dazai thought he could manage.

“Alright, alright! I’ll help with your prank!” Ron pointedly turned away from Dazai’s triumphant grin, “Just don’t expect anything *else* for Christmas!”

“Eh? Why would I do something like that in the first place?”

When Ron opened his mouth to counter, Dazai spoke over him. “We’re meeting up tomorrow during dinner to plan.” Taking a step back, Dazai spun on his heel. He reached out to nullify the last book mid-flight. It collapsed into his palm with a flutter of yellowed pages. “See you then!”

With that, Dazai began skipping down the hall and towards Professor Quirrell’s classroom.

“Wh—Dazai! Give me back my book!”

He snorted, twirling around while he walked. The cape of his winter cloak flashed out around the bottom. “Consider it insurance!” Dazai called, waving the charms textbook in goodbye. “Tomorrow evening, don’t forget.”

“Hey!”

Between learning magic with Quirrell and planning an elaborate prank with the Weasley’s... maybe this winter break wouldn’t be so bad after all. Dazai found himself humming all the way to Quirrell’s office despite himself. He couldn’t *wait* to tell Blaise about whatever nonsense was going to unfurl next.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter is pretty short, but sometime after this they all start getting a bit longer. my bad LOL

thanks for reading and commenting! y'all are the best :)

next update next Saturday as usual.

Attachment

Chapter Summary

Professor Snape reflects.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai gave his wand a little twirl and a small trail of green lights flickered to life at the end. Immediately, his insides twisted in protest. He cut the flow of magic off from the spell with a grimace. The verdimilious charm dissipated in the air abruptly.

“Very g-good!”

“Eh, you think?” Dazai asked casually, turning to see Professor Quirrell’s curious expression. He waved the wand around once more only to feel his stomach clench up in anticipation. Damn. “At this rate I won’t pass first year.”

Quirrell’s smile twitched when Dazai kept the bored expression on his own face. “W-w-well, I’m s-sure something will work out. J-just a bit more practice n-now.”

A bit more practice... Dazai wasn’t that optimistic. Still, he pasted on a thin smile. Dazai let his gaze wander around the room.

Professor Quirrell was a tough nut. Where most of the other students were easy enough to prank, pranking a teacher had to be something...

Something special.

Granted, he’d done his fair share of tormenting Professor Snape. But Dazai actually kind of tolerated Snape. Meanwhile, Quirrell was clearly someone with ulterior motives. Besides, he reasoned, it was winter break. Why not do something more exciting than casually destroying every cauldron Dazai ever touched?

His gaze flitted across a stack of ungraded essays on the professor’s desk.

“H-how about trying once m-m-more for me?” Professor Quirrell stuttered, tearing Dazai from his train of thought. “Unless... U-unless you think you might throw up. Again.”

“No.” Dazai shrugged. “Well, maybe.”

He smirked when Quirrell took a noticeable step back.

“I’m just kidding. I haven’t been sick from doing magic in a week.” Dizzy spells be damned, Dazai was *improving.*

Quirrell didn’t look all that reassured. But then again, did the man ever look sure of anything? Absolutely not. Dazai found that to be a delightfully deceptive trait—what better way to look unassuming than to give off the impression that you were scared of everything?

What better way to be underestimated than to look injured?

Dazai almost tugged at his bandages, but stopped himself just short. He smoothed out the aborted movement with another shrug of his wand and a mumbled, “Verdimiliious!”

The subsequent wave of green lights that shot from his blackthorn wand was almost rewarding enough to shake the heavy weight of cloth bandages from Dazai’s focus. The painful clenching of his stomach shook off the rest. Dazai held onto the spell until the nausea became almost too much to bear. Then he killed the spell, huffing with short breaths.

“Good j-job!” Professor Quirrell praised.

“Thanks,” Dazai’s voice was garbled with sickness when he replied. Luckily, he was trained in putting on masks. He recovered almost immediately, standing up straighter and smiling sharply even though his intestines were still tied in knots. “Professor Quirrell is too nice! Can’t you spread some of that kindness to my grades, Sir?”

The DADA professor’s laugh was just about as shaky and fake-sounding as everything else the man did. “I-I don’t think that’s g-going to happen, Mr. Dazai. Although I am quite a b-b-bit far behind on grading, so if y-you were to slip an old assignment on my desk, I w-wouldn't really notice the tardiness.”

Dazai raised a brow. Taking his eyes off Professor Quirrell once again, he scanned over the desk. As always, it was piled high with various textbooks, scrolls, and essays. Only a handful of them had the tell-tale red ink of a marked-up and graded assignment. One of the papers Dazai recognized as having been assigned over a month ago. It was completely bare of red ink and looked to be one of Hermione’s if the verbose, neat handwriting was any indication. “If you’re so behind on grading, I’ll do you a favor and not add to the load. Consider it my thank you for the extra lessons.”

Looking faintly amused (or perhaps annoyed—it was hard to tell with mafioso-types), Quirrell merely nodded. Dazai loosened the grip on his wand and leaned back into a desk.

“What’s got you so behind, Sir? All my other professors are on top of grading.”

The amusement withered quickly, and Quirrell tipped his nose up. “Just busy, I suppose.” He said shortly. “Quite a lot of work that goes into being a-a t-t-teacher.”

Dazai looked up from the papers then back to Quirrell. “Is that right?”

He imagined quite a lot of work *also* went into doing whatever the hell it was that Quirrell was actually up to. Like secret wizard mafia duties or... or screwing around with mountain

trolls on campus. Not that it was any of Dazai's business. Mastering his newly discovered magical capabilities was more important than foiling a fellow schemer's plans for fun.

Well, at least until something more interesting came along.

He barely noticed when Professor Quirrell retreated to his desk. "Indeed." the professor said, "P-perhaps we should stop now. Before y-you get sick."

"Oh," Dazai said, blinking. "If you say so, Sir."

"I do." Quirrell fussed over the papers on his desk in a way that made Dazai think he was just trying to look busy with his hands. "N-now that you've mentioned it... p-perhaps I am a bit too f-far behind the other professors." As Quirrell sorted through the pages and pages of ungraded student essays, Dazai caught sight of a particular prompt he recognized. Hadn't that been the essay Blaise was trying to complete before it blew into the Forbidden Forest all those weeks ago? Hm...

"R-remember what I said. About th-the essays."

"Got it." Dazai replied. He had no intention, of course, to turn in those late assignments. A much better idea was brewing in his mind now. The sort of idea the Weasley twins might like to hear about.

"A-and have a nice dinner now, Mr. Dazai."

Instead of settling in at the Slytherin table, Dazai steered himself directly towards where the remaining few Gryffindor students were already gathered. Most of the Great Hall was empty now that winter break had settled the campus over with frost. With Draco off-campus, Dazai wasn't going to risk sitting with the only Slytherins that had stayed behind. Professor Snape, Professor McGonagall, and a few other professors watched over the handful of students dining from their table at the head of the room. Quirrell still hadn't arrived.

"Good evening, fellow winter break enthusiasts." He greeted, making room for himself directly beside Ron without warning. "Or—what's the opposite of the *go-home club?* "

Fred and George both perked up from their meals to welcome him with joint waves. George answered him first. "After school activities?" Fred added, "Is pranking considered a school-sanctioned activity? Because we have multiple detentions to prove that's not true."

Dazai smirked and waved off their concerns. He slipped the strap of his book bag from his shoulder and placed it on his lap before turning to Ron. "So nice of you to join us."

"Well, you did steal my book."

“I did.” Dazai nodded. At the reminder, he retrieved the stolen book from his bag and set it on the table beside Ron’s plate. “You’re welcome.”

The twins snickered.

Glancing between his ragtag group of Gryffindor pranksters, Dazai couldn’t help but grin. He steepled his fingers and looked out onto their amused faces. “Let’s get down to business, shall we?”

No one seemed to object to Dazai taking the leadership position. Good.

Fred leaned forward over the table. “What did you have in mind, my dear little Slytherin?”

“For starters, Quirrell will be our target. By the end of winter break, I want him thoroughly fed up with us. Well, fed up with *someone.* Let’s try not to get caught.”

The twins nodded enthusiastically. Not surprising, considering they had already planned to attack the professor at some point over the break. Ron, for his part, seemed a bit surprised. “You want to prank a professor? You’ve got a death wish, mate!”

“Aw, afraid of a little detention, Ronnikins?”

“What’s Quirrell gonna do?” Fred snorted, “He’s petrified of everything! ”

Ron crossed his arms close to his chest. “I’m only a first year! I can’t just go ruining my life by—by screwing with a teacher. ”

Dazai snorted. “You’ve really been listening to all that stuff Hermione’s always going on about, huh? Anyway, there are plenty of good reasons for targeting Quirrell. Also, I’m like ninety percent sure he won’t have us expelled.”

When he was sure he had everyone’s attention once, more Dazai began, perfunctory, “Things we know about Professor Quirrell,” He counted off on his fingers, “He’s a bad professor, he makes me do extra work, he’s almost definitely in the wizard mafia, also he patted my shoulder once and I still haven’t forgiven him for that—”

“I'm sorry—things *we* know? ”

“Wizard mafia?”

Fred and George watched him with matching looks of humor and bemusement. Ron looked like he was seriously reconsidering joining this meeting.

Pointedly ignoring the interruptions, Dazai concluded, “These all very good reasons why we should prank Professor Quirrell with something much more exciting than a few stray snowballs. Anyway,” He gestured vaguely, “it’s a mutually beneficial prank.”

Now *that* recaptured their attention. Never say Dazai wasn’t good at keeping his subordinates in line. He smirked. “Here’s a fun tidbit—Professor Quirrell is *months* behind on grading

papers. Wouldn't it be such a shame if something were to happen to all of those ungraded essays?" Dazai tutted.

There it was—the spark of interest shining in Fred and George's eyes. Even Ron had perked up somewhat. Dazai fanned out his fingers, smiling serenely. He almost tried to channel some of Mori's blatant superiority, but it didn't really feel necessary. Not with how closely his subordinates were hanging onto his every word.

When Dazai leaned across the table, his band of red-headed idiots did as well.

"So here's the plan—"

"...I don't like it."

Minerva McGonagall glanced up from her pasta with a blank expression. She raised a brow. "You don't like anything, Severus."

He ground his teeth, then gestured to the far corner of the Gryffindor table. Dazai and three of the Weasleys were hunched over their meals, chattering quietly amongst themselves. Every so often, one of them would make a vague gesture that Severus was almost afraid to identify. When Minerva followed his gaze, she sighed. "They're *conspiring."*

" They're friends." She replied, listless. "It's not often you see a friendship between Gryffindors and a Slytherin."

Despite how prickly and frightful most Hogwarts students perceived him to be, Snape did in fact care a great deal for his snakes. Of course he had noticed the unusual friendship that had formed between one of his students and some of McGonagall's. That sort of inter-house relationship was rare enough, but for it to involve *Dazai Osamu* of all people...

Severus Snape didn't play favorites.

There was a simple balance Severus had found between caring for his snakes and not knowing a thing about them. It was a careful division between *"I'll do what I can to help you succeed"* and *"if I know your favorite food, I've gotten too attached."*

Dazai Osamu's favorite food was crab, and Snape had gotten too attached.

They didn't talk. He hadn't fallen *that* far. But...

Well, there was just *something about that kid.*

Maybe it was the inter-house friendships he seamlessly crafted. Maybe it was the complete and utter lack of magical talent. Maybe it was Madam Pomfrey knocking on his office door

twenty minutes after curfew telling him about *scars* and *starvation.*

Or maybe it was the fact that Quirinus Quirrell, too, had taken an interest in the boy.

As he'd promised Poppy, Snape had started watching over Dazai more closely. He'd seen how the boy barely touched his meal unless it was crab, in which case he would scarf it down like digestion was going out of style. Snape had watched the boy scratch at his arms and stare blankly at walls. Had seen his eyes turn to stone when he thought no one was looking. Everything Snape saw, he filed away—locked it up somewhere with a big, bright red flag that waved back-and-forth and begged for attention that never seemed to come.

And evidently, Quirrell had been watching too. What that man had seen, Severus couldn't be sure. The boy was utterly lacking in skill.

Sighing, Snape took a heavy swig from his drink. He set it down perhaps too harshly, and Minerva shot him a swift look. "I'm going to speak with the Headmaster. Keep an eye on... those four."

"I'm sure if they *are* planning something, there's nothing my watchful eye can do to stop it. You know how those twins are."

Snape did know. He was also coming to know what Dazai was capable of. He paled. "Do try, Minerva."

There had to be a limit to how many cauldrons that boy could destroy before he got bored... right?

McGonagall smiled thinly.

He rose with a weary breath, said a superficial farewell to the other professors present, and made for Dumbledore's office at once. As he passed the student tables, Snape briefly met his problem child's gaze. Dazai blinked up at him, brown eyes as innocent and deceptive as ever. His face had filled out with healthy fat somewhat since coming to Hogwarts. Even that slight improvement was worrying, considering how little the boy ate now. It made Snape wonder if he hadn't been eating *at all* before coming to Hogwarts.

Another red flag for the collection. Another silent worry.

(He wasn't getting attached. It was a teacher's duty to look this close.)

Snape turned away from the locked gaze quickly. He wasn't willing to answer to the amused interest in those eyes, though the expression did give him a moment's pause. He had a feeling that Dazai was the type to stick his nose where it didn't belong. The type to do well if he just sat down and *applied himself.*

Dazai didn't really try at anything except to be infuriating.

Pushing through the doors of the Great Hall, Snape hastily made his way through the corridors. Without any students around to block his way, Severus didn't even have to wear his cursory glare as he progressed. Instead, the expression he wore was thoughtful.

Snape's interest in Dazai was one of concern, much to his displeasure.

Quirrell's interest in Dazai was...

Something.

He let out a breath. The gargoyle guarding Dumbledore's office seemed to glare at him behind stone eyes. Snape tried to match that intensity with his voice to mixed results. *"Honeysuckle."*

As expected, the gargoyle stepped aside without complaint, revealing a stone spiral staircase in its place. It snapped shut with an echoing *thud* behind him.

A caged phoenix perked up when Severus entered. Dumbledore was waiting for him, already seated behind his cluttered desk. Snape pointedly ignored the numerous trinkets, magical items, and tomes scattered about the room.

"Severus, it's always good to see you." The headmaster hummed, pleasant as always, "However, if I'm not mistaken, you're to be at dinner right now."

"I could say the same for you."

Dumbledore chuckled. "I suppose we're both too invested in work to be taking breaks like that. What can I help you with?"

Straight to the point. *Good. "* Something needs to be done about Quirrell."

Albus' entire body seemed to sigh. He ran an aged hand through his long, curled beard. "We already spoke about this, Severus. It's best to keep him close for now."

"He's *dangerous."*

" He is, undoubtedly. But that doesn't change the situation."

Snape grit his teeth, and his frustration bubbled to the surface. He mentally retracted twenty points from Gryffindor. It almost worked to calm him down. *Almost.* He took a long, suffering breath. "*Doesn't change the situation—* was it not an entirely separate issue for him to simply be loitering around the castle? Quirrell's taken interest in one of my snakes!"

Dumbledore's eyes narrowed. "Osamu Dazai." He nodded. Standing, Albus crossed the room until he was crouched before the phoenix's cage. He reached in a finger to ruffle some of its sun-colored feathers. "You are overreacting, Severus. There is a bigger plot at play—tipping Quirrell off to our plan would only set unfortunate events in motion. Events we can't as easily control."

"For that man to take an interest in Dazai..." Snape hissed, "does that not concern you at all?"

A feather fell to the ground. "You're attached to the boy."

“I—” He blinked, head snapping to the side. “I protect my students.”

“You do. And I admire that in you, Severus.” The headmaster nodded. He cast a certain kind of shadow. “But you lack a grasp for the bigger picture.”

Snape bared his teeth to a tapestry on the wall. It hovered over him like a heavy cloak. He didn’t see Dumbledore’s determined expression nor the collapse of several more phoenix feathers.

“If he hurts my student—”

“A small casualty in the war at hand.”

Bigger picture...

A burst of firelight lit the room for only a moment. Albus removed his hand from the birdcage, unwilling to stroke the pile of ashes that remained. Snape was sure the phoenix would be reborn within the day, but he could never stand the ghastly cries it made upon waking.

What picture was bigger than the Dark Lord’s servant taking an interest in one of Snape’s students!?

“ Wait for Quirrell to make his move,” Dumbledore’s voice was a gavel, “Do not attempt to remove the student from his influence. There are too many unknown variables still at play.” *What had killed the mountain troll? Why was* that *door unlocked? “* Until we have answers, it is more important that our counter-movements not be detected. Tell me, Severus.”

He turned back. The phoenix was dead.

“What’s the worst that one boy can do?”

Chapter End Notes

snape: I'm worried that the dark lord is taking an interest in my student
Dumbledore: idk that sounds like a you problem

thanks for reading and commenting :) it means a lot

After School Activities

Chapter Summary

The prank begins! Ron and Dazai attempt to distract Quirrell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“ Oh, come on.” Dazai whined, tugging on Ron’s sleeve insistently, “This is hardly the worst thing I’ve done.”

The ginger let himself be waved around. “That’s not reassuring at all.”

“Ehhh~” He stooped lower, trying to peer up from under his bangs and into Ron’s averted eyes. “Please? I promise you won’t get implicated in the prank if you do a good job!”

“A good job. Right.”

“Just act convincing! Like,” Dazai cleared his throat, throwing on a falsetto for effect, “Professor Quirrell! I would just love to hear everything about your travels! I’m your biggest fan! Let’s only talk in this hallway and not go back to your office—”

“I’m not saying any of that.” Ron deadpanned, finally shaking off the clinging mass of mafioso. “And I don’t sound like that. If anyone has a squeaky voice, it’s you.”

“*Rude.”*

Dazai glanced to Fred and George for help. They were beaming at the exchange and snickering behind their hands. When Dazai made a high, whining sound somewhere deep in his throat, the twins straightened to attention.

“Come on, Ron!” Fred said, stepping up behind his younger brother and placing an arm on his back.

George nodded. “You already agreed to help! Besides, I’m sure Dazai won’t let you get into too much trouble.”

“I, for one, trust him completely,” Fred agreed easily. He nudged Ron forward, sending the boy tumbling to Dazai’s side.

Dazai reached out to steady Ron’s shoulders. Smiling pleasantly, he brushed some invisible lint off of the Gryffindor’s winter cloak. “It’s a simple plan—it’s not like you can mess it up. Stop worrying so much.”

“If it’s so simple,” Ron smacked the hand away lightly, “then why do I need to help?”

“I’m trying to include you. That seems like the sort of thing a good friend would do.”

Or a gang leader trying to strengthen the loyalty of his subordinates. It was all kind of the same thing, to be honest.

“Oi.”

Fred and George shared a brief look. They smirked, then saddled themselves at each of Dazai’s sides like two protective guard dogs. “You have to help him because we already have a job in this prank, Ronniekins,” they explained, “And he’s going to get lost if we let him wander off alone!”

Ron blinked. His eyes widened ever so slightly as the reality of that sentence sunk in. Almost immediately, the fight lining Ron’s shoulders seemed to dissipate. “Oh, *Merlin,* you’re right.”

Linking his fingers behind his back, Dazai watched Ron’s willpower wither and die. It wasn’t until the twins were wearing triumphant grins that he decided it was time to move things along. Dazai cleared his throat. Three pairs of eyes flashed to him.

“Now that everyone is back on board,” he passed a casually critical gaze in Ron’s direction, “Let’s get moving. Curfew is in about thirty minutes, so we’ll have to hurry.”

The twins nodded faux-seriously, not looking overly concerned. Dazai figured that was fair enough—if Fred and George had ever cared for breaking rules, it was before his time. Ron shuffled on his feet, but didn’t say anything. Good. Any decent subordinate should know when to hold their tongue.

“Ron and I are going to check Quirrell’s office first to make sure he’s not there. We’ll be distracting him and getting him out of the office so you two,” the Weasley twins smirked, “can sneak in and finish the job.”

“Roger that, Snakey!” they saluted.

“Good. Wait a few minutes before you follow us to the office. We should have it emptied out for you by then.”

Again, the twins merely nodded along. Dazai felt a thrill of eagerness flow up in him. Was this his first big job as a gang leader? It was starting to feel like it. It was a shame that his second in command wasn’t here to enjoy the rush of a successful job, but Dazai supposed it wasn’t really *official* until they had a gang name.

It also probably wasn’t official until he actually *told* his gang members that they were in a gang.

Well... one thing at a time.

Whirling on his feet, Dazai offered a wide smile to Ron. “Alright! Lead the way, friend!”

Drawing himself together, Ron gestured for Dazai to follow. He did, grinning. With a final wave goodbye to the twins, the mafioso scampered off down the halls in, presumably, the general direction of Quirrell's office. Once they had turned the corner, leaving Fred and George out of sight, Dazai skipped ahead to match Ron's pace.

They walked in relative silence for a few minutes.

"Ah, we're here!" Dazai hummed. He took a few steps ahead of Ron to grab at the office's door handle. "Great job, Ron!"

"It's not that impressive." The redhead replied, scratching the back of his head. "You're just bad at this."

"Well, that's true... Hey, do you think Professor Quirrell is in? To be honest, I haven't got a clue how to get him out if he is."

"Wha—" Ron squeaked, "I thought you had this whole thing planned out!"

Ignoring the objection, Dazai was already pulling the door open. The disapprovals spilling from Ron's mouth were immediately smothered as him mouth clamped shut. The ginger's eyes worriedly flipped between Dazai and the empty hallway.

Dazai peeked his head behind the door.

"I do. Isn't it more fun to not know everything, though?" He hummed and rolled back on his feet to face Ron. "It's fine, anyway. No one is here."

"Oh. Fantastic. Those two can handle this themselves then."

He shut the door with a quiet *click,* using his palm to brace the sound. "Hm? We're still going to find Professor Quirrell otherwise he'll catch the twins in the middle of our prank." Dazai waved his hand dismissively. "And I've already told them to rat us out if they get caught, so we should probably get looking."

Ron's mouth dropped open, but it snapped shut seconds later. "You're insane." He grumbled, "I can't believe someone like *you* gets an owl when *I* only get that stupid rat."

Dazai blinked. "You spend more time with Featherbrain than I do. At this point it's basically your owl. Maybe you can feed that rat of yours to it."

"...Maybe."

He grinned. "Okay! Where do you suppose Professor Quirrell is hiding, Ron?"

Ron huffed, taking a step back. "In bed like we should be? Curfew isn't too far off."

"I bet he's out prowling the halls." Dazai wondered aloud, speaking over Ron, "Or settling some shady deals."

"Or he's *asleep."*

“ Or he’s a sleeper agent for the—for your magical terrorism group. Good point, Ron.”

“That is not what I said.” The ginger pinched the bridge of his nose, then paused. Dazai startled from his ramblings when Ron suddenly speed-walked to the other end of the hall. “Angel! There you are! Where have you been, mate?”

Dazai followed after Ron at a lame pace, craning his neck to see the thin black rat that was perched on a window sill. It blinked two languid eyelids at him. *Gross.* Angel tilted its head back as if in greeting.

“Oh, great. Angel is here.” He groaned. “Good evening, stupid rat.” Dazai turned back to Ron. “Let’s get a move on. Your rat isn’t invited.”

“Oi.” Ron barked. “I’ve been looking for ‘im for ages! Thought for sure he was never gonna come back.”

Dazai quirked a brow.

Ron stood his ground. “He’s coming with us while we look for Quirrell. I’m not letting him out of my sight ‘till we get back to the common rooms!”

Angel seemed to smirk, which was every bit as obnoxious as Ron’s triumphant grin. Dazai felt his lips twitch.

“To be clear, I’m only agreeing as an act of great kindness on my part.”

“Sure.”

“I don’t like Angel. I want that on the record.”

Ron shot him a look, reaching out to hug Angel between two palms. “There is no record, Dazai. It’s just us here—I don’t think Angel even knows what you're saying. He’s pretty dumb.”

As if in response, Angel blinked again. Its body was eerily still. If Dazai wasn’t glaring down at it, he was sure it would be impossible to tell the damn thing was even breathing. With an overdramatic, frustrated sigh, Dazai relented. “ *Fiiiine,”* He whined, “I’ll carry him so he doesn’t wander off again.”

Ron smiled, looking distinctly amused. The clear fondness on his subordinate’s face drew a grin onto Dazai’s. Striding forward, Dazai reached his hand out to pinch Angel’s fur and pluck him out of Ron’s grip. However, the moment before he could touch the rat, it shot out of Ron’s cupped hands and scampered noisily onto the floor.

“Angel!”

Ron stumbled over himself as he bent over to attempt to collect the black rat once again. It sidestepped the attempt with nimble feet, quickly scurrying across the cold tile further away from the two. Dazai blinked.

“Your rat is *so weird.”*

“ Help me catch him!”

“Eeh,” the mafioso stalled for only a moment as Ron pounded down the hall after Angel. Once it reached the end of the hall, Angel stood on its haunches and turned. Dazai could almost convince himself it was watching—waiting for a response. But it was just a rat. A stupid one at that. He spared a brief glance to Professor Quirrell’s office. “Fine. But make it quick!”

His first job as a gang leader wouldn’t be a bust because of some stupid rat!

Dazai trailed after the duo a bit more speedily than his lazy expression may have suggested. Ron reached Angel before Dazai did, but once the Gryffindor was close enough to catch him Angel scurried off again. Dazai huffed. He had to skip to catch up once the two had rounded the corner.

“Ugh, you two slow down—!”

Dazai’s face was smothered by black cloth.

He stumbled backwards quickly, slipping into a defensive stance unconsciously. Dazai’s hands were half-way to shielding his face when his brain caught up to his eyes.

Ron was standing just to his left, looking worried, but not *afraid.* At his feet, Angel was sitting primly and watching Dazai with cold eyes. They seemed fine. They weren’t hurt. But then... who had Dazai just run into while turning the blind corner?

Dazai blinked and lowered his hands.

Oh.

He’d run straight into Professor Quirrell.

“Ah,” the mafioso mumbled. He willed himself to look more composed than he felt at that moment. *They had* just *bumped into each other, it wasn’t... it wasn’t an* attack. The thought stung. “Sir.”

The DADA professor was frowning down at him, wearing an expression somewhere between confusion, uncertainty, and concern. So... that was normal. He ran a shaking hand over his chest where the cloth had been wrinkled by Dazai’s face smashing into it. “M-m-mr. Dazai. And... Mr. W-weasely.” He hesitated, looking around nervously. Finally, his eyes settled back on Dazai, who’s nose was turning an impressive shade of red. *That* stung, too. “A-ah... a-are you alright, my boy?”

Dazai resisted the urge to rub at his face. “I’m fine, sir. I should be asking you that, considering it was *me* who ran into *you.”*

Not entirely true, of course. But Dazai was always willing to suck up to someone if he needed to. *Especially* if that someone was coincidentally also the victim of your latest prank.

Speaking of...

“Ron!” Dazai barked, bouncing on his heels pleasantly and smirking when the Gryffindor jumped, “Why don’t you tell Professor Quirrell why we’re out so late. I’m sure he’s thinking about giving us a detention since curfew is in...”

“T-t-twenty minutes.”

“Yes, exactly. Ron?”

The red-head floundered for a second. “Ah! My—my rat! Angel wandered off and we were just looking for him, is all—”

While Quirrell was briefly distracted by Ron’s flimsy excuse, Dazai allowed himself to search his gaze around the hall. Professor Quirrell’s office wasn’t in sight—*good.* Still, it was a precarious situation. Dazai was standing just at the edge of where the hall turned. If Professor Quirrell tried to step past him, he would be able to see his office easily. The twins may be experts (and he could trust them to be quiet about sneaking into Quirrell’s office), but if Dazai gave even an inch here they would be seen straight away.

The integrity of the entire plan hinged on Dazai keeping Quirrell from taking one step forward.

He shuffled a bit closer to Quirrell, consciously closing in the barrier.

Dazai tuned back into the conversation in time to see that Ron had finally recaptured Angel and was letting the rat rest on his shoulder. Professor Quirrell was listening to Ron’s explanation with a look of abstract bewilderment.

“So that’s... why we’re out. Around here. Er...”

“Yup!” Dazai cheered when Ron sent him a pleading look. “That’s a reasonable explanation, I think.”

Professor Quirrell blinked. It didn’t seem like he had really bought the excuse. “R-right... well, y-you two head back to your d-d-dorms now. Now that you have... the r-rat. It is getting ra-rather late, isn’t it?” He made as if to step past Dazai.

Thinking fast, the mafioso sidestepped into the teacher’s path. He briefly caught a look of irritation flash onto Quirrell’s face before it was replaced again by bumbling uncertainty. *Curious.*

"Ah, professor, there was actually something I wanted to talk with you about.” Dazai cut in, and Quirrell was forced to stop in his tracks.

“C-can’t this wait until tomorrow?”

“About the Verdimilious charm,” he deflected easily, “I think I’ve pretty much mastered the basics, don’t you think? I mean, I haven’t thrown up in a while and that feels like good

improvement. I was wondering if we could move on to some other spell. Like a killing curse —"

"I really d-don't have time tonight, Mr. Dazai" Quirrell snapped. He made to push past Dazai once again.

In the corner of his vision, Dazai saw Ron go still. It was brief, and moments later Ron bit back, "You don't have time for your favorite student?"

Both Dazai and Quirrell turned to stare at him.

"H-he's not... not my *favorite."* The professor stumbled, "I-I don't p-play favorites with my students."

Ron, somehow, looked equally surprised with himself for snapping at his professor. Still, he barreled on. "Well, Dazai is the only one you give extra lessons too, right? I... I *know* Hermione's been hounding all of our professors about it. But *she's* not getting remedial lessons practically every night!"

Oh.

Oh.

Ron was *much* more clever than Dazai had thought. He'd not only picked up on the fact that Dazai was the only student getting remedial lessons, but that there was something distinctly *unusual* about the scenario as a whole. Dazai felt himself grinning unwittingly. Not only that, but Ron had completely shaken what confidence Quirrell had managed to scrounge up.

He was shaping up to be a promising subordinate more and more every day. Ron had aimed his unexpectedly sharp intellect in Dazai's defense without any extensive manipulations on the latter's part.

How interesting.

Dazai could see Professor Quirrell running an assessing gaze over Ron. He quickly gathered the attention back to himself with a wave of his hand. "Aww, Professor you can say I'm your favorite! I'm sure Ron won't be too jealous."

Again, Quirrell merely stared. After a moment, he said, "J-just go to your rooms, boys. I have im-important w-work to do."

Too busy assessing the easy dismissal, Dazai wasn't prepared for when Professor Quirrell shoved into him again to push past him. He stumbled back a half-step and fell into Ron's chest with a light *fhwump.*

Ah. Shit.

When Ron had regained his bearings and steadied Dazai on his feet, he hurried to follow after the professor, an objection heavy on his lips.

Quirrell sped hurriedly across the hall straight towards his office. The twins were surely already inside—just seconds away from being caught. That was no good—Ron's mouth was half-open with the harsh call of "*Professor!"* below his tongue when Dazai put his hand out.

Ron halted immediately. Dazai gestured to Quirrell.

The professor was still hurrying away, evidently in a rush to get to his office. Only...

Only he was walking straight past his office and down the hall.

Blinking, Dazai let himself fall back into a more casual position. Beside him, Ron untensed as well. At the other end of the hall, Professor Quirrell disappeared behind a corner. "Ah," he let out a breath, "I thought our prank was foiled for sure. But he wasn't even going to his office."

Ron's whole body seemed to deflate. "I'm really going to get suspended for hanging out with you," he bemoaned absently. A second later, the boy's own words seemed to register. Without warning, he punched Dazai in the arm. "That's for nearly getting us expelled! And not actually having a plan at all!"

"I had a plan," Dazai mumbled, "It was 'distract Quirrell.'"

"Well, you didn't *execute* the plan."

Angel's whiskers twitched.

"Eh, he had already distracted himself. Doing... whatever it is he's doing right now. Twenty minutes to curfew..." Dazai trailed off. "What *is* he doing this late?"

Ron huffed, raising his pointer finger to rub under Angel's chin. "Who cares? Also, you remember the rules of our friendship, don't you?"

"Sure. I try my very best to ignore all of them."

"Fantastic." He deadpanned. "Rule number four: *please* never make me do a prank with you again."

"No?" Dazai smirked. "You looked like you were having fun! Didn't it feel nice to bully your teacher?"

"Well..." For a moment, it seemed like Ron might agree. He steeled himself. "Rule four!"

Dazai flapped his hand haphazardly. "Yeah, yeah. No more pranks with you. Come on, let's go see what Quirrell is up to so late."

"What did I just say?" Ron grumbled. He shot a subvert glance to Angel, who merely watched the proceedings with two empty violet eyes. "Can you believe this guy?"

"This isn't a prank. Call it reconnaissance." The mafioso beamed. "So, Mr. Directions, where was our favorite professor heading?" He paused, considering. "The teachers' dormitory?"

“Rule five: don’t call me Mr. Directions. And no—the teacher dorms are back that way.” Ron pointed a thumb over his shoulder.

Dazai skipped forward in the direction Professor Quirrell had wandered down. He hummed. The hall was empty.

With a weary sigh, Ron trailed after him. Angel, for once, didn’t seem entirely willing to scamper away.

“I only agreed to four rules. Sorry, Directions Guy.”

They turned the corner and Quirrell's office disappeared from view. The twins probably had everything covered without them keeping sentry. Hopefully. Dazai had just caught wind of something *much* more interesting to investigate.

“Rule six,” Ron continued, “Angel is a part of our friend group now. Be nicer to him.”

“Absolutely not.”

Chapter End Notes

today's weird update time is brought to you by my nonexistent sleep schedule
we'll get to see what the twins actually did in quirrell's office next chapter

thanks for reading and commenting! ily!!

The Forbidden Forest

Chapter Summary

The prank continues! ...kind of.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"How are those two doing out there?"

Fred shrugged, craning his neck around a mountain's worth of ungraded essays stacked on top of Quirrell's desk. "Guess Squirrelly Quirrell-y is closer to entering his office than we thought." He hummed. "Sure are a lot of essays here. Kid wasn't joking!"

George hummed in passive agreement as he mentally rolled over their plan. Now that they'd snuck into their professor's office with Ron and Dazai outside distracting Quirrell, the next step was... "Well, we should hurry up then."

Nodding, Fred withdrew his wand from his cloak. Beside him, George did the same. They each pointed their wands at the massively tall stacks of ungraded student essays. With a swish, a flick, and a few muttered phrases, their magic was cast.

At once, the papers burst into life! They took to the air, flutter and flapping about like paper swallows circling the desk.

Fred beamed. "Animating the essays so Quirrell can't catch them—"

"—and charming them to fly into the lit candle when he tries—"

The twins shared a look.

" *Brilliant."*

By the time Professor Quirrell would realize that he'd never be able to catch the animated essays, they would have all burnt up. A truly devious plan, really. Not only was it a truly clever prank, but it was helping out their fellow students as well.

"Kid really has a flair for the dramatic, huh?" George hummed, a large grin splitting his face as he watched the essays circle over his head. A particularly thick chunk of papers flopped noisily past him. Those pages must have gotten stuck together somehow—after all, *no one* would write more than six pages for a silly DADA assignment!

Fred pretended to wipe a tear from under his eye. "They grow up so fast!"

The kid really did. The Dazai who had planned this prank out was a much different Dazai than the one purchasing a suicide manual all those months ago.

“We’ve done a good job big-brothering him,” Fred continued, on the same mental page as his twin (as usual).

George agreed. “We should do something to celebrate. Maybe charm Professor Snape’s chair to slide out from under him.”

“Or give Mrs. Norris catnip while Filch is off giving some poor first-year detention.”

“ *Or,”* They said in one eager voice, “We could snoop around Quirrell’s office for something exciting.”

Behind all the stacked books and essays and—well, most of the essays were flying now—there *must* have been something exciting. A special dark arts spellbook? Or... Something embarrassing like... like Quirrell’s diary!?

“Well, we were going to sneak around anyway.”

“That’s true.”

With a shared grin, the twins split off from one another to search the office. They opened drawers, lifted tomes, flipped through personal notes...

“Ah,” Fred said after a minute. He was hunched over a large crate tucked underneath Quirrell’s desk. It was pulled out somewhat so that the ginger could look inside. “What is *this?”*

George peeked over his shoulder. His eyes immediately shot wide open once he caught a look at what was inside the box. “That, my dear twin, is something very, *very,* interesting.”

Meanwhile, the papers were fighting for air space overhead. Hermione’s essay was winning —it had a lot more bulk to work with.

“Rule twenty-one—”

“I don’t even follow the rules I agreed to—why are you still going?”

“It’s the principle of the thing.” Ron announced. He’d taken the lead in following Professor Quirrell’s trail at some point. The hallways were barely lit by a line of wavering torch lights, lending their nighttime escapades a pair of long shadows. Every time a flame flickered, the shadows would skip across the stone floors. “Rule twenty-one: follow rules one through twenty-one.”

Dazai smirked. “Just those ones?”

“Rule twenty-two: Shut up.”

“Hmmm,” he hummed, “I don’t think I will.”

Ron shot him a look somewhere between annoyance and fondness. Dazai watched the boy’s expression shift through the corner of his eye. “Shouldn’t you be watching the halls? We’re out after curfew now, y’know. Filch is bound to be around somewhere.”

In response, Ron patted Angel’s head. “I’ll just say we were running after Angel again.”

“Devious.”

It was, in a *Ron* sort of way. He didn’t really seem the type to instigate nefarious plans like Dazai or his prankster brothers, but once Ron was caught up in something with you, he was there to stay. It was somewhat reassuring. A good trait to have in a subordinate.

Unfortunately, he *wasn’t* a great subordinate for stealth missions. Whereas Dazai’s steps down the empty Hogwarts halls were muted and soft, Ron’s were marked by the *tapping* and *slapping* of shoes on the tile. Dazai didn’t think that anyone was around, but if Quirrell noticed them following...

Well, that would ruin all the fun!

As it was, however, Quirrell was some ways ahead of them. That gave Dazai the barest of confidences that he could hold an entire conversation without being caught. Mori would say he was being overconfident.

...Mori wasn't here right now.

Dazai spared the briefest of glances to Angel, who met his eyes head-on. He looked away immediately to watch the door numbers grow increasingly smaller as they walked.

Angel *would* make a good excuse to be wandering out this late. Maybe that stupid rat really did belong in his gang like Ron had suggested.

He huffed. “We’ve been walking for a while now... are you sure Quirrell went this way?”

They passed a creaking suit of armor. For a moment, Dazai thought it was going to spring to life, but it held resolutely still.

“There’s nothing else down this way. Just classrooms and storage. Besides,” Ron replied. He pointed up. “The torches are lit, see?”

Dazai blinked, following Ron’s finger to the line of lit torches hung on the walls. They cast the hall into a dim, red light. “So?”

“It’s after curfew.” He said, matter-of-fact. “The torches go out after curfew unless a teacher is walking by—then they light back up.”

“Oh! How do you know that?” Dazai hummed. He bounced on his feet and followed the path of lit torches as they stretched down the corridor. When he turned to look behind them, Dazai noticed some of the farther fires had begun to flicker out.

“Those twins are always going on about their pranks, it’d be pretty tough not to pick up something!”

Dazai wondered what sort of other nightly escapades Fred and George must have gotten up to for them to learn such a neat little tidbit... maybe that was an inquiry for when they weren’t actively engaging in a reconnaissance mission. Dazai filed that one away for later when he had a little less on his plate. Instead, the mafioso watched Ron easily navigate Quirrell’s candle trail with a reassessing eye.

Ron Weasley was just full of surprises tonight.

“You’re pretty handy, huh? Maybe you should sneak out with me more often~”

“Oi, what happened to Rule Four?”

“Ah, you’re no fun.” Dazai pouted and kicked up his feet. Then he blinked. “Oh, he turned here.”

Sure enough, where the hallway diverged into two paths only one side was lit by torches. Ron hummed and they took the red-hued right path over the dark one to the left.

“What’s down this way, Ron? More classrooms?” *Damn, he needed a map.*

“ A few. Also...”

Well, Ron worked well enough too.

“ Also..?” Dazai’s voice lilted curiously at the end as he poked Ron in the side.

“ *Also*,” Ron snapped, slapping the perpetrating finger away, “An exit—leads outside. No one really uses it since it only goes down to Hagrid’s hut.”

Hagrid... Dazai had only seen him in passing and heard about him from chatter. Was Quirrell going to meet the groundskeeper out this late? And in such a hurry? Dazai had written Hagrid off as a relatively unimportant player, but it was possible he’d been mistaken. The thought made knots of his intestines.

“Hmm.” He hummed. “Okay.”

The torches lead them to the door.

“I guess we’re going outside.”

“*What?!”*

Dazai beamed, then pushed the doors open. A gust of cold, brittle air blows into the corridor and flickers all of the lit torches overhead. They all blew out, casting the hall back into darkness. Dazai shivered.

It was snowing.

“We aren’t following him outside—are you *crazy?!”* Ron squeaked, voice barely above a whisper. When Dazai stepped past the threshold into the winter night, Ron hurried to catch up. Behind them, the doors slammed shut with the force of the weather.

Dazai shot him a wry grin. “A little.” He tucked his hands into his sleeves when a sudden gust of snowy wind bit at his nose. “And so are you for following me... Ah, is your rat going to be okay?”

Angel didn’t look his way. It stared off blankly into the distance. Ron answered in its stead. “He can sit in my cloak if he gets too cold. Or maybe he’ll just run off again.”

“With any luck.”

“Oi!”

Chuckling, Dazai turned his gaze from Angel frozen frame to the snowy landscape around them. Sure enough—there was a trail of shoeprints in the snow headed down the hill. Though... he traced the path as best he could in the darkness.

“Hm.”

Ron shook with a sudden chill. “Wh-what?”

“Hagrid’s hut is that way, isn’t it?”

There was a plume of chimney smoke beaconing the groundskeeper’s building. The cold that barraged Dazai’s face stung a bit more at the thought of sitting by an open fire.

When Ron followed Dazai’s pointing finger, he continued. “I thought so. Look—Quirrell didn’t go that way. He went...”

It really *was* hard to see in the dark. Luckily, Dazai had fairly good vision. Consider it a product of practice aiming a gun at incredibly small targets for hours on end. But what was he aiming at tonight?

“Oh!” *Target acquired.*

Dazai perked up when he found the trail’s destination, but immediately regretted it when the wind stung at his exposed neck. He huddled back into his cloak. “He went into the Forbidden Forest. The—well, my Slytherin friends and I hang out near here all the time. Didn’t know there was a door so close, though...”

Ron glanced at him, then back to the forest before grimacing. “I have the distinct feeling that I know where this is going. The Forbidden Forest is *forbidden,* Dazai.”

“Thanks for the recap. You’re coming in with me, right?” Dazai hummed, overlaying his snowy tracks with Quirrell’s. He hopped into the next one, then glanced over his shoulder to smile Ron’s way.

“Why are you so insistent on following Professor Quirrell?” Ron asked instead. When a particularly rough gust of wind blew past, the red-head put a protective hand over his shoulder where Angel was perched. The rat, unprompted, crawled into its owner’s sleeve. “You don't have to make trouble of *everything,* Dazai.”

“One: I absolutely do.”

Ron huffed.

“And two...” Dazai dropped his voice into a thoughtful whisper as they neared the tree line. “Some things are worth making trouble of. Quirrell is one of them. Probably.”

“I have no idea what that means.”

Dazai waved him off, smiling grimly. “That’s fine. Are you coming?”

“Unfortunately.” Ron grumbled. His grumpy exterior only worsened when Dazai’s red face split into a grin. “I already know I can’t stop you. And if I don’t follow you in, you’ll just wind up lost out here. Then I’ll have everyone on my back for gettin' you killed by... by whatever sort of monsters live out here!”

The snow tracks they were walking through vanished into the forest’s shadows. Dazai crossed the barrier. Ron followed.

There was a moment of silence, perhaps to appreciate this new treachery (*Dazai*) or to question one’s life choices (*Ron*). The bare trees rattled in congratulations regardless. It was a moment before they both picked up Quirrell’s trail again beneath the shadows of coniferous trees.

Dazai made a curious sound. “I don’t think any monsters will give us problems, Ron.”

“We’re going to die.”

“You think?”

“...Please don’t sound so excited.” Ron groaned. He rubbed a hand over his face then dropped it to his chest. “L-let’s hurry up. I want to go sit by the fireplace and never think about your stupid pranks ever again.”

“Reconnaissance.” He corrected absently.

What could Quirrell be doing out here so late? And in such horrid weather, too? Dazai was seriously starting to consider Ron’s *sit by a fire* plan. Even the Slytherin dungeons were an improvement to whatever nonsense this was. So whatever had drawn their most mysterious professor to the Forbidden Forest tonight must be *very* important.

Dazai blinked owlishly into the woods. The thick undergrowth tugged at his cloak and shadows smothered his sight.

" *Merlin's beard,* it's d-dark." Ron hissed, an undercurrent of fear sticking to his tone. "Can you—I can't see the tracks anymore."

"Me neither." He squinted. What sort of things needed to happen in a dangerous forest? Clandestine meetings, hiding secret things, getting killed by scary monsters—oh. "I wonder if there are any mountain trolls native to this area."

"*What?!"*

" Ah, just thinking aloud. Don't worry about it."

Ron stared at him with wide, terrified eyes. "I am very much worrying about th-that."

"Don't bother." Granted, killing the first troll had really knocked Dazai's brains around. But... well, magic got easier to more he practiced (of course, *easier* meant *physically capable of* and not *practically capable of*). Maybe killing magic creatures with No Longer Human worked the same.

Dazai came to a halt. Ron stumbled into his back, clearly not having noticed his new mafioso-shaped obstacle with how dark the forest was at night. More than that, with how the wind was howling and spitting snow, it was almost impossible to hear anything but their own conversation. There was no way he was going to be able to listen for Quirrell's footsteps or conversations like this. And with their shoeprint path impossible to see, too...

"Do you know the wand-lighting charm, Ron?"

The other boy startled briefly, then nodded. "Of course I do! W-we learned that in the first week!" He reached around in his cloak for a moment before retrieving his wand with a shaking hand. *"L-l-l-lumos!"*

Nothing happened. Dazai pouted. "Don't stutter so much if you want it to work. You sound like Professor Quirrell."

"It's bloody *c-cold* out here! You do it!"

"I'm fairly certain that you'll have to carry me back to the castle if I try anything like that."

Ron paused, his face paling. Dazai thought he must have been recalling their last experience with his magic at the owlery. That had sure been fun! Well, as much fun as sending a letter to Mori could be.

With a smirk, Dazai added, "And your best friend Draco isn't here to help carry my weight, so it'll just be you on your own. That seems like a lot, really."

Ron's brows pinched together as he grumbled, "I could just leave you here, y'know."

Dazai's teasing expression froze in place. *Ah...*

“Ahaha, I’m counting on you Ron! Do your best!” Dazai cheered enthusiastically. “Otherwise I'll probably get lost and die without you. Actually, I’m not averse to that. On second thought—”

“Lumos!”

“Damn.”

Dazai felt it before he saw it—the magic swirling around the tip of Ron’s wand. A small, bright light sparked to life at the end of the stick hazily. It was small enough that the light barely helped to see through the snow. Ron pointed his stick at the snow until the footprints were visible once again.

“Thanks.” Dazai commented, following the tracks once again.

“You’re welcome.”

Luckily, the snow wasn’t compact enough to crunch under their treading shoes. Dazai was already weary that they were being too obvious about stalking Professor Quirrell into the Forbidden Forest. It was only thanks to the gusting white wind that he was sure they wouldn’t be heard or seen. Of course, that was a double-edged sword. Dazai wouldn’t know where Quirrell was until they were right on top of him.

He ground his teeth.

Somewhere to their left, a bramble thicket rustled noisily. Ron jumped, drawing closer to Dazai’s side and reaching out for him. Dazai narrowly avoided making skin-contact. *Wouldn’t want to cut that Lumos spell out now...*

“ It’s just the wind. Well, it might be some kind of beast, but it’s probably nothing a brave Gryffindor like you can’t handle.”

“You’re the *honorary* Gryffindor!” Ron hissed, wincing when a pair of thorny vines battled overhead in the weather. “Y-you fight it off!”

“That’d be too much of a headache. Hey, don’t wave your wand around—I can’t see anymore.”

Hesitantly, the light spell stopped flashing around like a strobe light in Ron’s panicked casting. Once it settled back on the footprints, Dazai nodded assuredly. “Good boy.”

“H-hey!”

It was only seconds later that Dazai abruptly stopped once again. A buzz of magical energy burnt at the base of Dazai’s skull, indicating that No Longer Human had just flared up. He rapidly looked around for the source of magic he’d just nullified.

Ron squinted up at him beneath two eyelashes flecked with snow. “What is it this time? I’m pointing it just fine—”

"Do you see that?"

Ron followed his gaze. He was half-way to lifting his wand to cast the clearing in shadow when Dazai realized what he was seeing. He squeaked.

It was nearly impossible to see through the darkness and the flurry of snow, but in the forest opening just ahead, two figures were stood together. One of them must have been Professor Quirrell. But who was he talking with?

" *Shit,"* He hissed. He didn't take his eyes off of the shadowy figures, instead reaching out blindly to smack at Ron's wand. "Put that out! Turn it off, whatever!"

Dazai didn't wait to see if Ron did as he was instructed. His attention was focused solely on peering around the brush to see who was there. The two figures were still huddled together and talking lowly with one another.

Good. Neither figure had noticed that they had a hidden audience.

Yet.

Feeling around him sightlessly, Dazai tugged down Ron's sleeve until the lion was pulled into his side behind a bush. The boy let himself be pushed into the thorny shelter obediently.

A perfect hiding spot for some perfect intel gathering.

Hogwarts was feeling more and more like the Port Mafia as the year went by.

Chapter End Notes

I don't have time to edit and proofread this lmao
thanks for reading and commenting! it means a lot!!

ALSO: no update next week! I'm going to be too busy to update Saturday, so the next chapter will be up on Dec. 26th.

Mystery

Chapter Summary

Dazai and Ron hide in the woods, then celebrate the holiday season with some particularly interesting stolen contraband.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The whistling wind pulled the barren branches of tall, dark trees like it was drawing a marionette overhead. It cast the ground in shadow. Only the neon white of snow marked where the air stopped and the forest floor began. The force of the weather made it hard to breathe and the nipping ice rooted everything in place.

Also it was cold.

Also it *sucked.*

“I forgot my scarf...” Dazai whined.

“*Shh!* They’ll hear us, pea-brain!”

His winter cloak was not helping *at all.* And Angel wouldn't huddle under *his* clothes like a portable space heater with claws. Dazai looked to the two mysterious figures again. They hadn’t moved. Maybe they were frozen in place, too.

“It’s fine.” He insisted, ducking into his collar. “They can’t hear us. Hell, *we* can’t hear them. It’s too windy. Can I borrow Angel, *please—”*

“ No, Dazai, you can’t use my pet as a handwarmer.” Ron intoned. “Not until you apologize for calling him stupid!”

Dazai hummed. “I’ve called it worse things than that. Also my fingers are turning blue and I’m very, very sorry.”

Ron made an assessing noise, then, “Tell it to *Angel,* not to me. And don’t call him *it*. And rename your owl—”

“Never mind, I’ll just freeze to death.”

“D-d-d-did you hear th-that?”

Everything. Stopped.

Ron's eyes blew wide suddenly in fear. With all their bickering, the severity of the situation must have momentarily escaped his notice. Dazai also tensed up, feeling a cold spiral of fear bite at his spine. All of the cold racking Dazai's body was chased away by stark, numb fear. He hadn't been paying enough attention, even after charging all the way down here with such confidence.

That had been Quirrell's voice.

Father would be disappointed. He'd been taught better than to bicker so uselessly while doing *recon* of all things. Caught before he'd even really started—

"I can assure you, Quirinus, you head nothing. I have taken the liberty of placing a charm around the area to ward off intruders." Another voice. Familiar, but muffled behind the wind as it picked back up. "*Some stray creature, perhaps."*

Who was that? The familiarity of the voice tickled the back of Dazai's skull.

Also— the area was charmed? That must have been what activated No Longer Human. Some sort of area-based effect to prevent entrance. It was good luck that whoever this mysterious person was hadn't noticed their spell canceling out. Dazai shook his head. *One thing at a time.*

"I d-don't know why y-y-you wanted to meet here of all pl-places..."

Dazai couldn't make out the other figure's response behind the gusting weather, but neither of the cloaked individuals seemed keen on investigating what Quirrell had heard. He and Ron were still undetected. For now.

He strained against the wind to make out what was being said. Dazai only caught the last bit of the unknown man's next sentence.

"*—students aren't supposed to know about the Philosopher's Stone, after all."*

...Philosopher's Stone?

Dazai glanced at Ron in askance, but only found his own confusion reflected there. Distracted by the lack of comprehension in his friend's eyes, Dazai again only caught the final few words of what the stranger said next.

" *—how to get past that beast of Hagrid's yet?"*

Something tickled at the base of Dazai's head. That was...

Oh.

He *did* recognize that voice.

Quirrell's voice was hidden behind a sudden gust of wind, but the other man's oily reply was not.

"You don't want me as your enemy." Professor Snape growled.

Another string of conversation was lost behind a flurry of snow. Dazai felt his brows pinch together. Just what was going on out here? And why was *Snape* meeting with Quirrell? He had been under the impression that Snape barely tolerated the other, stuttering professor. Dazai leaned forward, eager to hear more information that might piece the situation together.

In the snowy clearing, Snape's frame had grown tense and his voice had grown heated. Everything he was spitting out was indistinct beneath the stormy winds.

"I-I'm j-j-just trying to h-h-help him! P-p-p-promise!"

"That student is one of my—" the black branches clattered overhead loudly and Snape's voice was lost behind it, *"—don't understand nor respect your interest in him."*

...Were they talking about *him?*

Quirrell made a sound like squeaking. " *I-I-I-I want to h-help all my students g-grow! E-even if th-th-their potential is a bit d-d-difficult to s-see at times—"*

Oh, they were *definitely* talking about him.

Dazai strained against the weather, hoping to hear more about what Quirrell thought of him. Certainly, that had been a similar question on Dazai's mind: what had gotten Quirrell so interested in him?

Unfortunately, the wind only let up in time for Dazai to catch the tail-end of Snape's final sentence.

"—decided where your loyalties lie."

With that (whatever *that* was), Snape flipped the hood of his cloak up. Face hidden in shadow, the potions master whirled on his feet and exited the clearing in the opposite direction of where Dazai and Ron were hiding without giving Quirrell even a second to respond.

They held their breaths, waiting for Professor Quirrell to follow. Quirrell stood in silence for nearly a minute before following in the direction that Snape had disappeared down.
Or... *no.* That hadn't been silence, exactly. But with the wind roaring around him, Dazai wasn't able to make out what Quirrell was mumbling to himself.

It was another moment after Quirrell was gone that Dazai felt himself untense completely.

"What in *Merlin's name* was all *that?!"*

Well, that summed everything up nicely.

Dazai met Ron's eyes and did the only thing he could do:

He grinned like an idiot.

“Not a clue. Something interesting for sure.”

Dazai tried to rub the exhaustion from his eyes to no effect.

He’d spent all last night lying awake in bed, running over what he and Ron had overheard in the forest. Whatever Professor Quirrell was up to—it was *much* bigger than Dazai had anticipated. But as it was, Dazai didn’t have enough information to decide where he stood. Was it worth interfering, like he’d originally planned to? Or was this... this *Philosopher’s Stone* too high profile?

It was too hard to say. Dazai didn’t want to risk outing himself as an ability user, and he certainly didn’t want to alert the magical community to the Port Mafia’s intentions.

But then again... did Dazai really have a choice? At least part of the reason Quirrell and Snape met last night was to discuss *him.* That had to be significant. And Dazai wasn't usually one to just let something like that go. Unfortunately, he hated going into this mess *blind* less than he liked having Quirrell's attention. It was the greater evil of the two. At least as far as Dazai could see. He bit his lip, deep in thought.

Someone bumped his shoulder. When Dazai looked up from his musings, Ron was watching him with pinched brows.

Dazai smiled wearily and drew his knees up to his chest.

One of the best things about winter break was that the castle was very nearly empty. It was a bit easier to breathe without so many eyes around. This meant, of course, that Dazai was a little bit more free in where he wandered. Draco would have his head if he knew that, at that very moment, Dazai was sitting on the floor beside the Gryffindor fireplace.

The twins had managed to smuggle Dazai into the Gryffindor common rooms by virtue that no one was there to stop them. Compared to the Slytherin common rooms, these ones were much warmer. Dazai could only really describe his current surroundings as “cozy.” There were soft, red sofas and armchairs spread about the room, but Dazai’s group had settled for kneeling on the floor rug. Warm sunlight filtered in through the windows.

Fred and George were currently piling up a stack of wrapped boxes, each one labeled with a Weasley’s name on it. The sunlight caught on the various colored ribbons and wrapping paper. Dazai tried to amuse himself with their antics, but Quirrell’s conversation with Snape last night was still buzzing around in his head.

“Oi,” Ron mumbled quietly, “Quit thinking so much. Let’s just enjoy Christmas, mate.”

George made a noise of agreement as he reached over to drop a present into his little brother’s lap. "You’re not worried we’ll get caught, are you? You did a great job distracting

Professor Quirrell—I don't think he *ever* went to his office last night!"

Ron and Dazai shared a quick look.

"I wouldn't stress about it." Fred added, smirking devilishly, "Anyway, we have something *very* interesting to share about last night. You're gonna *love it,* Snakey . "

Dazai blinked. "Did you find something in Quirrell's office?" Maybe this Philosopher's Stone thing?

The twins merely grinned.

While those two finished picking their own presents out, Dazai turned to Ron.

"Is that stupid rat of yours around?" He asked over his knees.

Ron sighed. "Ran off again after last night. Once I got back to bed, he scampered off to Merlin knows where... You don't think he's raiding the kitchens, d'you? I could get in serious trouble for that."

Dazai shrugged. "I wouldn't put it past Angel. So," he gestured to the presents strewn about, "What's this then? Don't tell me it's the infamous Weasley Christmas sweaters I heard so much about?"

The other boy grinned sheepishly. He waited until the twins had settled in, then tore off the wrapping paper with a certain kind of vigor.

In sync, all three Weasley brothers pulled out an overlarge, red sweater from their respective box. On the face of each shirt, a letter was stitched in. "R" for Ron's, "F" for Fred's, and "G" for George's.

Dazai smirked at the weary expression on Ron's face. "It's nice." He hummed, pleasantly. "Is the *R* so you don't forget your name?"

Fred answered instead. "I think it's so Mom doesn't forget ours! Isn't that right, Gred?"

George beamed. "Sure is, Forge!"

The twins donned their new sweaters with an eagerness reserved for people who were planning a mischief of some sort. Beside him, Ron put his on with more care. He shot Dazai a dull, if accommodating look.

Dazai rubbed a hand self-consciously over his plain school robes.

The mafioso shook himself, then watched, amused, as the boys went through the presents their parents had sent. Fred and George flipped through stacks of candy and various items that Dazai was fairly sure would be used for pranking at some point. Much to his surprise, even Dazai himself had gotten some candy—a single chocolate frog from Hermione. He had let it hop away dispassionately, thinking that maybe Angel would come around sometime and choke on it.

Ron was half-way through a box of chocolates when he suddenly blinked up from his goods. He turned to Dazai, mouth stuffed and smeared with sweets.

“Didmm ur folffs geff you anyffim?”

Dazai made a face. “Swallow, please. What are you saying?”

The twins briefly met each other’s eyes with an ambiguous downward quirk of their lips. They translated for him. “Didn’t your folks send you anything for Christmas?”

Oh. Dazai snorted. Fred and George already looked deeply upset before Dazai had even begun to shake his head.

Of *course* he didn’t get anything for Christmas. The most he might ever receive for some trivial holiday would be a ruffled dress from Mori and a new scar from Father. *Honestly.* Being so high up in the mafia didn’t leave either of them much room for silly traditions. But the Weasley kids wouldn’t want to hear about that.

Dazai pasted on a smile instead. “Ah, well, I did get a letter from Mori.” He patted the chest of his cloak where the folded parchment was tucked away. “Haven’t read it yet, though. It’s probably something tedious.”

The twins caught each other's eyes. Some sort of silent message passed between them. After a moment, they both turned their full attention back to Dazai. When they did, there was something heavy and protective in their expressions.

It was kind of gross.

It was also *just* the sort of loyalty Dazai liked to see in his subordinates. The twins were really just the gifts that kept on giving.

“Since your folks are so stingy,” Fred began after a pause. George finished, “*We’ll* just have to give you a very special gift instead!”

Dazai felt his lips twitch upwards.

“Remember what we said about something interesting happening last night?” When Dazai nodded, George continued, “Everyone’s favorite squirrel Quirrell was hiding something in his office.”

Fred *tsked* playfully. He winked.

“Well...”

With one fluid movement, both twins reached behind the pile of discarded presents. They grabbed something and lifted it with a look of concentration on their faces like it was somewhat heavy. They held the item aloft for only a moment before setting it down on the rug between them. Fred and George wore matching proud grins, the beamed at Dazai as if waiting for a reaction. The item that the twins found in Quirrell's office...

Dazai blinked.

It was a medium-sized, black object—big enough to fill all four of Fred and George's combined hands. Though he didn't reach out to touch it just yet, the item seemed to radiate heat. It altogether gave off the appearance of being a large piece of shiny charcoal. Only... every so often Dazai could just barely make out the slightest of movements. A slight shift in position closer to the open fireplace. It looked almost like...

"You—"

Their grins spread from ear to ear. "We stole it."

"You stole it. *Wow."*

" Merlin's beard." Ron gasped.

"That's *awesome."* Dazai also gasped. It was a different sort of gasp. "What is it?"

"Some kind of egg." Fred said, sounding very pleased with himself. By his feet, the egg rocked slightly. "Found it hidden under Professor Quirrell's desk. And now it's yours! Happy Christmas!"

George nodded, "We thought it must have been either a secret or something pretty important. Either way..."

"Too interesting to pass up." Dazai finished, awed. An egg of that size—it was no normal bird. But given the range of magical creatures in the world, Dazai thought that it could contain just about anything!

He mentally rolled through all of the books he had looked over throughout the year. Magical creatures had been one of his main areas of study for some time after Halloween, after all.

The twins nodded energetically. Dazai found himself leaning closer to the egg with an excited twinkle to his eyes. As if feeling the magical black-hole that was Dazai move in, the egg edged slightly further away. He hummed, thoughtful.

"So? What type of creature is it going to be, then?"

And why did that Professor Quirrell have it?

The twins glanced to one another, then shrugged.

"Not a clue, mate."

"We were hoping you might know, being that you're always in the library."

Dazai made a thoughtful noise deep in his throat. Unfortunately, identifying magical creatures hadn't been the main focus of his studies. He told Ron and the twins as much, though obviously held his tongue about what he had *actually* been studying at the time. He

didn't think they would much appreciate the fact that he was researching why he could kill a troll with a single touch.

"Aww," the twins whined, but they didn't seem to be all that upset about it, "Shame."

Realizing that Ron had been quiet for quite some time, Dazai shifted his attention to the other first year. Ron's eyes were wide as he stared down at the mystery egg. It was swaying in time with the flickering flames beside them. *Curious.*

"Hm?" Dazai crooned, "What's that face for?"

"Th-that's..."

Interested, the twins leaned over the egg so that their faces were right in front of Ron's. Dazai perked up slightly.

"You recognize it, huh? Guess Ron really *is* useful."

Maybe you can be my third-in-command, Dazai thought amusedly.

The red-head didn't rise to the bait laid out for him. He was quiet for a second, seeming not to care for the anticipation building in the air. After a long moment passed, Ron's gasping voice declared, "That's a dragon's egg!"

Ron's words hung in the air for a moment.

Only a second passed before the twins had shot back to their spots on the rug. Their eyes bugged out as they stared down at the large black egg.

"A dragon egg!"

"Are you sure?"

Ron puffed up, but his wary gaze held on the egg. "Sure I'm sure! Don't you ever listen to all that dragon nonsense Charlie spouts out?" When he caught Dazai's curious pout, Ron added, "Our older brother. He's off studying dragons in Romania. Ah—see how it's leanin' towards the fire like that? Only dragon eggs do that, I think. Something about needing fire to hatch."

They all stared at him, momentarily dumbfounded.

Dazai was the one to break the silence. "You're secretly a genius. Weirdly observant. I don't know how to feel about that."

"Th-thanks, mate." Ron flushed, "I think."

Dazai shrugged. He easily turned his focus back to the egg.

"...Quirrell had this?" He asked after a moment. Under his breath, Dazai muttered, "Why?"

"Not a clue!"

“But you like solving mysteries, don’t you?”

Dazai frowned. Brows pinched, he squinted up at the twins. “What makes you think that?”

Fred and George seemed to pause for a moment, looking startled at the question. George cleared his throat, then smiled half-heartedly. "Well, you two got back awful late last night. Figured you were snooping around.”

“...Right.” It hadn’t been *that* late. Though maybe Ron returning to their common room covered in snow had tipped them off to something.

Fred waved off Dazai’s obvious skepticism. “Er, what *were* you two up to, anyway?”

Dazai ignored the way that Ron’s eyes sought him out. He grinned lazily. “Snooping around, obviously.”

The twins beamed. “*Obviously.”*

He shot a brief look in Ron’s direction, but it looked as if the Gryffindor was going to take his lead on this one. Hm... Dazai silently considered the merits of *not* involving the twins in this Quirrell conspiracy. Was there a benefit to keeping them in the dark?

Fred and George smiled amicably at him, eyes shining with obvious mischief and curiosity. The dragon’s egg swayed.

...Well, they were a part of his gang, weren’t they? No point in leaving some of his most trusted gang-members behind, was there?

“What do you two think of Quirrell?”

The twins blinked in perfect sync. They briefly met eyes.

“Well,” George hummed, eyes alight with humor, “He’s a bad professor,—”

“—makes you do extra work,—”

“—*definitely* in the wizard mafia, I hear,—”

“—a total git, really.”

“Oh!” George nodded fervently, “A real buffoon.”

Dazai quirked a brow.

“Er,” they said, “Well, you really don’t like him. So neither do we.”

“That’s enough for you two?” Dazai asked point-blank. When they merely nodded, he made a thoughtful sound deep in his throat. Somewhat stupefied by the blind loyalty, he added a mumbled, “Okay. Huh.”

“*Ahem.”*

Ron leaned forward, hovering over the egg with a perplexed scowl.

“Yes, Ron?”

“Did we not hear the same conversation last night? *Quirrell’s* not the suspicious one! It’s Snape who’s up to something!”

Dazai huffed. “How so.”

The twins shared a look. Before Ron could reply, they carefully raised their hands.

“*What.”*

Fred and George grinned. “Care to fill us in on this juicy little conversation first? You know we just *love* gossip.”

With a nod, Dazai caught the twins up on what they had heard in the woods the night before. It wasn’t much, given how the wind had obscured much of the conversation. But it was enough. Fred and George listened with rapt interest, brows scrunching together in thought every few seconds. When Dazai mentioned the Philosopher’s Stone, there wasn’t even a flicker of recognition on their faces.

“Anyway,” Dazai summed up, “Quirrell is obviously up to something dangerous. You don’t have a secret meeting in a forest unless you’re a criminal.”

Ron shot him a look. “And, given that *Snape* was there, we know he’s a threat to Hogwarts. And whatever this Philosopher’s Stone thing is.”

“But Snape isn’t wizard mafia, so we know he’s not a problem. Try to keep up, Genius.”

“Dazai, mate,” Ron said, sounding exasperated, “You can’t say ‘*you don’t want me as your enemy’* in a good way. Snape is up to something!”

“Yes you can! You’re just not trying hard enough.”

“Hey,” Fred interrupted, looking vaguely amused. Dazai’s mouth snapped shut. Both he and Ron turned their full attention to where the twins were sitting. “No bickering, you two.”

George clapped a hand down on each of their shoulders. Under his breath, he muttered, “*Merlin,* being a big brother is tough work.” He smiled, then spoke directly to them. “The whole thing is suspicious. Let’s agree on that.”

“Dazai,” Fred continued amicably, “Why are we sure that Snape isn’t a threat to Hogwarts and this Phil's stone thing?”

He huffed. The *don’t treat me like a child* hung dangerously close to slipping off his tongue. “Because he isn’t one?” (Snape, watching him disappear into Quirrell’s office with weary concern in his eyes—). “He’s investigating Quirrell, too. Along with the rest of the staff here, if I had to guess.”

At the look of blank surprise flitting across everyone's faces, Dazai bit his lip. "Only I'm not sure of all the pieces at play here. But it's serious enough to get Snape worried, at least. And that guy doesn't even get worried when I blow up potions every day."

Ron's mouth opened, then closed. He didn't look fully convinced. "Shouldn't we leave this to the professors, then?"

"No. I'm an insufferable bastard. I want to meddle."

Quirrell picked me out for some reason. Dazai ground his teeth. *I can't just ignore him now.*

"Why? Aren't you having fun, Ron?" Dazai asked instead, smiling pleasantly, "You have a pet dragon now. That's pretty cool."

Ron paled. "It's not my dragon!"

"Aww, why not? A dragon is sort of like an owl, isn't it? It's all you've ever wanted!"

"Because dragon breeding is illegal, obviously! It was outlawed by the Warlocks' Convention of 1709, everyone knows that!" Ron spared a pressed glance to Dazai. "Well... maybe not everyone."

"I resent that."

He shrugged, not looking at all apologetic for the remark.

Fred poked the egg, knocking it back and forth. "That is a good point."

George hummed. "How did Quirrell get his hands on something like that?"

"Because he's a criminal with shady connections." Dazai smirked. "As I said: Wizard mafia."

"Suspicious~" The twins chimed. "Point one for Dazai's Wizard Mafia theory!"

"He'll notice it's missing." Ron persisted, "I don't wanna get in trouble for having Quirrell's dragon egg!"

When the fire danced, the egg danced with it.

Dazai felt his grin turn to a point. "If he tells the professors about it, we'll just tell them who we got it from. They're already suspicious of him, so they'll obviously take our side. No—he wouldn't be *that* stupid."

"He'll know that we have it, though."

True. Their prank hadn't exactly been *subtle.* Loudly parading Quirrell away from his office had blatantly spelled out at least half of the culprits. And honestly—it wasn't hard to figure out the twins were involved. It was only a matter of time now before Quirrell confronted someone about the theft. But Dazai knew criminals like he knew the back of his hand,

because his was a *very* criminal hand. Quirrell wouldn't risk the extra attention on himself, not when he was already in deep trouble with Snape. Whatever was going on there was serious business, Dazai knew. No—he would go straight for the thieves responsible.

"Well, if he wants it back, he's going to have to catch it first."

The Weasley's frowned at him in obvious confusion.

"What does that mean? We're going to hide the egg from him?"

"Ooh!" The twins cheered, "Blackmail!"

"Hide it? No, no, no." Dazai's teeth looked sharper in the firelight. "We're going to hatch it."

Chapter End Notes

thanks for your patience and well-wishes about last week! We'll be back to our regular Saturday update schedule now--at least until I run out of buffer chapters.
and thanks for reading and commenting! ya'll are the best!!
sorry this chapter is anticlimactic, but i never did say i was good at writing lmao

note- some of the dialogue from this chapter was pulled from the first harry potter book.

see yall next Saturday! hope everyone has a nice winter season and new year :)

The Honorary Gryffindor

Chapter Summary

With winter break nearing its close, the other students return to Hogwarts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*Dazai, you've made so much progress! I'm so proud!*

I'm a bit worried about you getting sick so often, though. You've always been such a fragile child, haven't you? I'll have to give you a nice, long check-up once your home, okay?

Although I'm afraid I may have to vie for your father's attention for you. He misses you very much, so hurry home! Honestly, if he threatens to wage war on Hogwarts for stealing you away one more time, I may have to usurp his position myself!

...I'm just joking. Please don't have your owl do something horrible to my office again.

In the meantime, keep practicing your magic. I'm sure you'll have something impressive to show me by the time you return to Yokohama. And keep pursuing this Philosopher's Stone business. It all sounds very interesting to me. I'm sure the Port Mafia could benefit from all the work you're doing over there. Collect if for me, if you can.

Are you staying out of trouble, Osamu?

M."

The letter sat buried beneath a stack of books on dragon rearing.

"Bosssss!" Dazai whined, rolling his entire weight across the leather chair haphazardly, "Welcome back."

Draco frowned. Pansy and Blaise hovered over his shoulders.

"What on Earth is wrong with you? Did you get up to trouble while I was gone?"

"No!"

He coughed.

Draco stared him down for a moment, expression thin and searching. Dazai let the boy's eyes rove over him with a numb interest. Draco's nose scrunched up as he took in the scene: Dazai, sprawled messily across a leather chair, face pale and clammy, eyes glassy and unfocused...

"You're sick." He observed after a minute.

"I'm not *sick*. I'm..." Dazai gestured helplessly. "...drained. I'm a bit drained. From practicing like the good subordinate I am." He paused. "Also maybe from standing out in the snow for an hour without a coat. I don't really know how this works."

The members of the Loyalty Club frowned down at him with pinched, tired expressions. Blaise was the first to stride forward. He planted himself firmly at the arm of Dazai's chair.

"Didn't I tell you to take care of yourself while we were gone?"

"I don't remember that."

Blaise huffed. He reached the back of his arm out to Dazai head, then pulled back at the heat radiating from there. He turned back to Draco wordlessly.

"Well," Draco said, brows pulled tight together in something like wary consideration, "You wouldn't have gotten sick if you'd just gone home for winter break. Then you could've come to this year's famous Malfoy holiday party with the rest of us. That way we could have kept you in line."

"Parties are boring, Boss."

Pansy made a haughty noise. "As if your father would even let mudblood trash like him through the doors."

"Boo," Dazai whined before Draco could respond, "Pansy is boring too, Boss."

He threw an arm over his eyes. Even in the dimmed lights of the Slytherin common room, the flickering fireplace was giving him a headache. At least Dazai knew that Ron was faring better—after all, *he* didn't have remedial lessons with Professor Quirrell every other day. Ron *also* didn't have a nullifying ability to work against. So, kudos to him.

Although, in light of recent events and a particular stolen egg, Dazai figured Ron was busy enough as it was.

Someone poked his side. Dazai curled away from the offending finger and glared from under the shade of his sleeve.

"Go to the nurse if you're not feeling well," Blaise intoned.

"Why were you wandering around outside anyway?" Draco interrupted, taking a seat near the roaring fireplace, "I thought you would stay in here the whole break, considering every time

you leave the room you inevitably get lost." He paused. "Wait. Don't tell me you got locked outside?"

Dazai completely ignored Draco's question. "That's a part of my charm."

Pansy scoffed. "Being insufferable?"

"Don't tell me you don't love it. I won't believe you."

She sighed. Dazai reveled in how utterly displeased she sounded. Then he choked on another cough.

"You should go to the infirmary," Draco said, voice contemplative. "I don't want you getting me sick."

Dazai made a long, grumbling moan. "M'not sick, Boss."

"Right. You're *drained,* whatever the hell that means. Go to the nurse."

"I'd rather just lie here forever. Sleep is nice."

Draco drew in a breath. Sounding distinctly pleased with himself, he turned his focus. "Okay. Blaise—take him to the infirmary."

Blaise put a hand on Dazai's shoulder. "I was already planning on doing that, obviously."

"What?" Dazai blinked, shooting up too quickly and immediately wavering with a wash of dizziness.

The obnoxious little weasel smirked. "Get a move on. Madam Pomfrey has potions for this sort of thing, you know. You'll be better by dinner so we can get back to practicing spells. I want to see if you've actually improved over the break."

"I *haaaave*," he whined, flopping further down the chair and glaring half-heartedly in Draco's general direction. Dazai was also fairly sure that potions wouldn't work on him. At the very least, he didn't want to test that theory with an audience. "Which is why you should let me sleep in."

"Blaise."

"Yeah, yeah." Blaise hummed. He grabbed Dazai's arm and hauled him to his feet. When Dazai stumbled to correct his blurring vision, a hand caught on his shoulder to keep him upright.

Once the world had stopped spinning, Dazai grumbled, "She's just going to tell me to sleep it off, idiot Boss."

"Come back when you're done coughing."

Blaise gently shoved Dazai's back, urging him out of the common rooms.

“...Draco is boring, too. You’re all no good to me.”

He heard Draco snort, then the entrance snapped shut behind them. Blaise didn’t waste time to keep guiding him down the corridors. Once it was clear that they were alone in the hallway, Blaise shot a blank look at Dazai.

“Are you feeling ill?”

“I don’t really get sick,” Dazai said with a shrug. There was a cough tickling the back of his throat.

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

“I know.”

Even with most of the students back on school grounds now, the corridors were mostly empty. Judging by the weary expressions on his friends’ faces, Dazai figured that the long ride to Hogwarts must have worn out most everybody else. Because of this, Blaise and Dazai only passed a handful of other students while they walked to the infirmary. It was nice—a final reprieve before classes started again and the halls were as congested as always.

Blaise really *did* look exhausted, though. Taking pity on him, Dazai briefly added, “I’ve just been up to my usual tricks while you all were gone. Consider this—” he coughed lightly, “—karma. Or something.”

“Nothing too dangerous, I hope.” Blaise said with a pointed look, “Not that anything could stop you.”

“It was only a little dangerous.” Dazai replied off-hand, “But I brought back-up. Blaise worries too much.”

They rounded a corner and Dazai officially had no idea where they were. He shuffled a step closer to Blaise as if that would keep him from getting lost.

“Remind me to tell you about it later.” He added.

Blaise didn’t spare a glance his way. “But not Draco or Pansy?”

“My second in command deserves to know what’s going on. As for Draco and Pansy... those two are more like low-level grunts. Also I think Pansy might be planning to kill me.”

“That does sound like her.”

They walked for another minute, chatting quietly amongst themselves. After some time of following behind Blaise like a lost puppy, Dazai was stopped in his tracks. The infirmary sign hung just overhead.

Glancing between Blaise and the door, Dazai smiled sheepishly. He hesitated just shy of actually reaching the nurse’s office. “This might take a while.”

Blaise hummed.

"...I'll come find you once Madam Pomfrey is done with me?"

"Don't make it sound like a question." Blaise intoned, pinching the bridge of his nose. "If you want to ditch me to do something idiotic, just say so."

"Oh." Dazai blinked. "Well, I'm always planning to do something stupid. I'd say you could come with this time, but I don't think Ron is going to let a Slytherin like you into the Gryffindor common room."

Blaise's left eye twitched. "Do I even want to know what sort of nonsense you're getting up to now?"

"I mean, probably not. But I'm going to tell later you anyway."

"Great. You still have to go to the infirmary, Boss."

"No I don't!" Dazai groaned, "I'm not sick!"

Blaise merely rolled his shoulders. "You have a fever. Can't you save whatever chaos you're brewing until after you're better?"

Shaking his head fervently made Dazai's vision swim, which entirely negated the point he was trying to make. He scowled at his own body's betrayal, then scowled at Blaise when he saw the boy's amused face.

"Ron is waiting for me." As an afterthought, he added, "And it's kind of time-sensitive. Probably."

"*Probably* ."

Dazai shrugged, looking away to make sure the hall was still empty. "I don't know how long it takes for a dragon egg to hatch."

Blaise blinked once. Then again. After a moment of staring blankly at Dazai's announcement, he sighed heavily.

"It was an eventful winter break." Dazai said by way of answer. He backpedaled away from Blaise, then turned on his heels in the general direction of the Gryffindor dorms, "I'll tell you about it tonight, alright?"

"The infirmary isn't down that hall, Dazai."

"Nope~!"

Dazai blew a kiss.

He could feel the force of Blaise's exasperation all the way to the Gryffindor common rooms, discounting the three wrong turns he took getting there.

The door to the Gryffindor common rooms was, just like the Slytherin entrance, activated by uttering a password. Unlike the blank wall in the dungeons, however, this one was guarded by a painting of a lady. She watched Dazai with blatantly suspicious eyes.

He rapped the back of his knuckles against the stone wall beside the painting, fairly sure that touching the enchanted image would destroy it. The painted woman scoffed.

“Can’t you just let me in?” He asked, knocking a bit more forcefully this time.

“Not without a password.” The painting replied, sounding snappish. She leaned forward and cupped her pale face between her palms as if bored. “You’re just going to stand out here and wait.”

Dazai raised a solitary brow. “Just call a Weasley out for me. You can do that, can’t you?”

“I suppose.”

She didn’t make to move. Dazai bared his teeth in a hollow smile. “Now, preferably.”

The painted lady offered a thin-lipped smile.

Getting into the Gryffindor common rooms had been ten times easier with the Weasleys parading him down the hall. It was a shame—with all the students back on school grounds, they couldn’t own the halls any longer. *Maybe once he announced his gang to the whole school...*

Dazai was just about to add another snapping remark to his request when the painting door swung outward.

A pale, ginger-haired head poked out from behind it, looking around curiously.

Dazai frowned. “Who are you?”

The person’s eyes snapped to him. They were clouded with confusion for a moment before they seemed to alight with realization. “You must be Dazai Osamu.” The stranger concluded, voice precise but welcoming, “Fred, George, and Ron’s Slytherin friend. I’m Percy Weasley, Gryffindor prefect.”

“The prefect.” Dazai mumbled to himself, recalling vaguely his conversation with Ron at the book store months ago, “Right. Hello. Are your brothers around?”

Percy nodded. “The twins are away.” He said shortly. “But Ron is up in his bed, last I saw. He had his curtains all drawn up—he better not still be sleeping this late. I’ll send him down for you—”

“Actually,” Dazai cut in, kicking his foot out to catch the painting with his shoe before Percy could swing it closed. “I was hoping I could just pop on up there. Say hello. All that.”

“I’m afraid that’s not permitted,” Percy said after a moment. “Only Gryffindor students are allowed past here.”

Well, the twins certainly hadn’t cared about that little rule. Dazai coughed lightly into his sleeve to smother a laugh.

Percy’s brows immediately scrunched together in something like worry. “Are you feeling ill? I should walk you to the infirmary. As a prefect—”

“No thanks.” He waved off the concern. “Is it banned, inviting Slytherins into your common room? Or just frowned upon?”

“What?”

“Is it *banned?”* Dazai repeated with a pout.

“Well, n-not technically—”

“Great! I’ll just sneak on past you then.” Without waiting for further affirmation, Dazai snaked through the barely open painting and into the Gryffindor common rooms. He brushed the prefect’s sleeve as he passed. “Thanks Percy! You’re a real swell guy!”

Behind him, the elder Weasley made a sound as if he were utterly perplexed. He seemed to flounder for a second, gaping at the unexpected and unwarranted entrance.

Dazai didn’t care as he skipped across the Gryffindor common room and towards the bedrooms. He pushed through a swarm of Gryffindor students. Was the whole house loitering in the common rooms right now? He ducked around a few tired-looking Gryffindors and offered them a disarming smile. They blinked back, stupefied.

Percy’s calling voice came a moment later. “Mr. Dazai!”

All the eyes of Gryffindor were on them now, tracking the snake slithering across their lion’s den. Mostly, Dazai saw confusion there. Confusion and anger. Maybe hate. Being a Slytherin certainly came with some negative implications. Hanging over Draco’s shoulders like a lazy cat all the time probably wasn’t helping Dazai to seem approachable, either. An angry mummer rolled through the crowd. Dazai felt his spine tense up in preparation for an attack, and he forced his skip to a slow, halting step.

He caught Neville’s eye in the crowd, and the boy offered a reassuring smile.

Coming to a stop, Dazai beamed and whirled on his heels to face the prefect once again. He rocked in place. “What?”

Percy raced up to him, still looking decently jarred. “Please don’t just invite yourself in.”

The mafioso rolled his eyes. “You’re no fun.”

Under his breath, Percy mumbled, “I can see why the twins like you so much.”

Dazai grinned.

Seeming to realize that he’d been overheard, Percy straightened up self-consciously. He cleared his throat. “That is to say, you seem to be quite the... free spirit. You would have made a good Gryffindor with that nerve and daring.” Percy looked around to the myriad of faces watching, then made a brief placating gesture with both hands. It didn’t seem to do much to assuage the crowd. House loyalties would always be too strong for something like that. “I suppose I can’t convince you to wait for me to fetch Ron, can I?”

“Nope.” Dazai hummed, popping the *p* loudly. “I’m very determined. Just another of my Gryffindor traits.”

It took a moment, but Percy seemed to finally manage shaking the perplexed, vaguely annoyed look from his face. He turned to face the growing crowd around them. “He’s fine, everyone. Dazai is just a friend of Ron’s. I’m sure he won’t be causing any trouble.” Percy gave Dazai a pointed look.

Dazai held his tongue, then grinned. Ron would probably scold him later if he said that he was *always* causing trouble, even if it *was* more accurate.

“He’s a Slytherin!” A voice yelled, “He shouldn’t be in here!”

“I bet he’s here to steal our things!” Another agreed. Dazai briefly wondered if they were recalling Neville’s broken remembrall.

Another wave of jeers rose up from the crowd. Pasting on an empty smile, Dazai focused his attention back on Percy, who was quickly beginning to look overwhelmed.

“I’ll be quick.”

“Please.”

With a nod in thanks, Dazai spun around and hurried to the bedrooms. A wave of protests followed after him, but Percy's presence seemed to hold them at bay. Once he reached the door, Dazai quickly snapped it closed behind him and shut his eyes. He leaned against it and took a deep breath.

All those people surrounding him... Dazai’s stomach clenched painfully.

“Dazai? How’d you get in here?”

He blinked his eyes open. Ron’s head was poked out from behind the curtains of his bed, looking confused. The ginger’s expression was taught. “I thought we were meeting in the hall.”

Dazai took a moment to catch his breath. “We were. But I wanted to see...” He coughed a little and looked around to ensure that they were alone, “...I wanted to see the egg myself. Has it hatched yet?”

Ron stared at him for a minute before relenting. He waved Dazai forward. Grinning broadly, the mafioso strode forward then crawled onto Ron's bed. He fixed the curtains back into place behind him.

In the middle of the bed, the black dragon's egg rocked back-and-forth. It didn't seem any closer to hatching than it had been during Christmas. Dazai needed to look over some of the books in the library before he could say for certain though.

"No." Ron said with a frustrated sigh.

"Have you been keeping it on the fire?"

The boy shot him a glare. "When I can. It's not exactly easy to sneak a dragon egg around the common rooms! Not now that everyone is back, at least."

Dazai shrugged, leaning in the inspect the egg while being careful not to touch it.

"I don't see why *you* can't hatch the dragon." Ron continued in a grumble, "This is your idiotic plan, after all."

"Because," Dazai said, "It's always freezing in the Slytherin common rooms. I don't think anyone could hatch a dragon in those conditions."

Not to mention that he would probably kill it with a single touch. But Ron didn't really need to know that. And until Dazai got a read on Quirrell's reaction, the egg was staying put here.

"Why? Is this too difficult for you?" He added, teasing.

Ron barked. "No! I just don't know about getting involved in your schemes."

"You love it. And don't worry so much about getting in trouble. I have everything under control."

The look he got in return was something like exasperation. Dazai tried not to feel too pleased with himself.

Ron had his hands wrapped around the egg when he seemed to realize—

"Wait. Did you just come in through the front door?"

Dazai blinked, falling back onto his palms with a cough. "Yeah? Not much of a warm reception around here, to be honest. You lot should work on that—"

"Dazai!" Ron exclaimed. "Now my housemates all know that we're friends! Them *not knowing* was the whole point of Rule One!"

"Was it?" He raised a brow, glancing over his shoulder to look around for the shadows of other students beyond the curtains. "You know I've never paid attention to those rules of yours. It's too much fun to see you upset about them."

“They’ll hate me for hanging out with a Slytherin!” Ron continued. Then, more quietly, he added, “And they’ll have a reason to target you.”

Dazai turned back to his friend. He rubbed at his chest, but that didn’t shake off the warm feeling building up there. “That’s not true! They love me.”

“No. They don’t.”

“They will! Eventually.” Dazai offered a crooked grin. “I’m very lovable. And I'm an honorary Gryffindor, like you said. I’m sure they’ll come around.”

Ron glared. “I said that while possibly facing down a wild beast. It didn’t mean anything.”

“It did! Anyway, I'm pretty sure everyone already know we hang out.”

Suddenly, Ron socked him in the arm. It was more of a tap than anything else. Feigning hurt, Dazai puckered his lower lip.

“You’re an idiot.” Ron grumbled, not unkindly. The egg wavered in agreement. Seeming to remember their primary objective, Ron reached for a stack of blank papers on his bedside table.

“Usually, yeah.”

With the air a little less tense, Ron deflated into his bed. He withdrew his wand from somewhere, then offered Dazai a brief glance. “...Shame you’re horrid at magic. I’m going to tire myself out casting *incendio* all day.”

Dazai hopped off the bed and onto his feet. He followed the wand’s movements. “The fire-making spell? The twins can probably help with that.”

“Probably.” Ron hummed. He flicked his wand. “*Incendio.”*

A small, yellow blaze began eating up the papers slowly. The kindling *crackled* and *snapped.* Ron set the egg down over the flames.

“Is that not going to spread?” Dazai inquired. He eyed the curtains warily.

“Nah,” Ron said, shrugging. The tiny fire lapped at the egg. “Too small for that. Anyway, Eggy likes it so it's no big deal.”

“*Eggy?”*

Ron flushed. “Like you could come up with anything better! And I’ll have a better name for ‘em once it hatches and we can see what sort of dragon it is!”

“Still. *Eggy?”*

Ron huffed, wearing a scowl like a coat. Dazai smirked.

“If that’s your standard for pet naming, I don’t know how you can be so upset with my owl being called Featherbrain,” the mafioso jested.

With a pleased nod, he stepped out of the protective box of curtains around Ron’s bed, “I should get going before Percy loses control of the rioters out there. Wouldn’t want them charging in here and seeing you with that egg.”

Though Ron paused at the mention of his brother’s name, he merely nodded. “If Perc loses control of them, they'll be tossing you out the window.”

“Ah... is that something I should be worried about? I thought Gryffindors were meant to be the good ones.”

“Not to Slytherins.” The ginger answered succinctly.

Dazai chuckled lightly. It threatened to turn into a cough at the end, but he managed to swallow that down.

He quickly said goodbye to Ron with a promise to check back up on the egg’s progress throughout the week. Though now that the rest of Gryffindor definitely knew about their friendship, Dazai could maybe take a slightly different approach than *breaking into their common room.* Not that it mattered much. He had more important things to worry about for now.

Namely: this so-called Philosopher’s Stone.

If there was ever something that Dazai wasn’t supposed to know about, he was *obviously* going to investigate it with all of his cold, dead heart. Whether it was something Quirrell had or something Quirrell wanted...

Well, Dazai wanted it too. If only so Quirrell wouldn’t have it. And with Mori finally giving him an objective: collect the Philosopher's Stone...

Dazai gave a friendly wave to Percy as he passed back through the common room. The prefect’s hand rose slightly to wave back, though the look he wore was slightly dumbfounded. Around Percy, the dozen or so faces of Gryffindor students watched with equal bemusement. Dazai was pleased to see that it was mostly the older students who looked upset. The first-year faces that he recognized seemed almost resigned to this level of chaos from Dazai. Enough to not chase him out with a pitchfork and flame, at least.

“Thanks for your hospitality, or whatever.” Dazai hummed, treading around a group of older students cautiously, “Even though you weren’t nice at all.”

A ripple of offended and perplexed mumblings ran through the crowd. Dazai shook off their quiet conversations. He’d win them over eventually.

One thing at a time.

Without looking back, Dazai gave a final wordless goodbye. His hands were faced out to push open the exit when a sudden voice caught his attention. Dazai halted.

“Where do you think you’re going without saying hello first?”

His eyes snapped to attention, searching the crowd for—

Hermione’s smile was wide and honest where she stood just outside a second dorm room. Upon seeing her, Dazai’s face split into a grin as well.

“Hermione!” He greeted, spinning on his heels to face her as she approached, “It’s a shame you went home over break. No one here would sit in the library and pour over research with me.”

She laughed. “I missed you, too.”

Someone cleared their throat and Dazai was suddenly reminded of his surroundings. The mix of Gryffindors shuffled tensely around them.

“Ah,” He coughed into his sleeve. “Maybe we should talk somewhere else?”

Surprisingly, Hermione’s face morphed into something like anger. “Oh, you lot!” She shouted at her housemates, whirling on them aggressively, “Dazai isn’t trouble! He’s not like those nasty Slytherins with their supremacy nonsense!”

“It’s true.” Dazai smirked. “Ron says I’m an honorary Gryffindor.”

Ron was going to throw something at him for saying that.

From the crowd, Dazai noticed some of the first-year Gryffindor students nodded in vague agreement. Odd, considering he’d barely interacted with anyone here. Probably more nonsense from Ron and Hermione about him being *nice* and *lonely.* Something Dazai was still steadfastly pretending never happened.

Percy watched them with an odd expression.

Dazai opened his mouth to explain that he would leave anyway when he was suddenly interrupted.

“Actually,” The prefect cut in, “It’s about dinner time. I’m afraid you’ll have to continue this conversation later, as I can’t leave a non-Gryffindor student unattended in our common rooms. Dazai,” he said seriously, turning his full attention to the Slytherin, “I can walk you to the infirmary If you need.”

Dazai waved him off. “I can manage. Thanks.”

“Dazai—”

He blinked at Hermione, smiling slightly at the pressed look on her face.

“Don’t look like that. Anyway, Blaise will yell at me if I don’t show up for dinner. He’s like an overprotective dog sometimes.”

Whether Hermione was convinced or not went entirely ignored. It was best not to push his presence in the Gryffindor rooms before Dazai really had time to cement them as his subordinates. For now, he merely smiled pleasantly. The mafioso pushed the door open.

“Ah, before I go,” Dazai said, foot hanging out the door, “Hermione, there’s a topic I need to look into. I need your expertise in library navigation to find it. Care to lend a hand?”

The tension melted off of her face, immediately becoming replaced by fond excitement. “Always!”

“Great!” He snapped his fingers. “I'll see you later then, Hermione.” Dazai hopped out of the open painting with a final nod to Percy, who was staring at the pair with something like befuddlement.

Hermione’s response was muffled beneath layers of Gryffindor murmurings. Dazai paid it no mind. He was already skipping down the hall towards a short-cut the twins had shown him.

Even though the egg was no closer to hatching, it seemed, catching up with Ron and Hermione was great progress. Dazai was sure that having Hermione at his side to wade through textbooks would make finding relevant books on dragon identification much easier. Not only that, but he may finally locate a book on this Philosopher’s Stone thing. Just as Snape had mentioned, it was near impossible for a student like himself to learn about it. But Hermione spent more time than he did at the library. Maybe she would have better luck than he’d been having.

At the very least, searching together might be less boring than digging through dusty, old books alone.

Chapter End Notes

you may be wondering why dazai has a cold in this chapter. the answer is "because i said so"

catch me writing absolutely nothing these past three weeks
thanks for reading, kudos-ing, and commenting! love yall
next update saturday!!

Bluff

Chapter Summary

Dazai and Quirrell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Now that the second semester has begun," The history professor, Binns, was saying, "It is time to start preparing for your final exams. I expect all of you will be completing your essays on time in order to best prepare yourselves—"

Dazai slunk further down into his seat until only his hair was poking over the table.

"He might as well be directly talking to you."

He blinked. Draco was staring down at his scroll, writing a note down intermittently. Dazai could just barely make out the slight quirk of amusement on the boy's lips as he spoke under his breath.

"He's not. He probably doesn't even realize I'm in his class."

Draco's quill scratched something down in clean, exact cursive. He whispered, "He was staring straight at you when he said that. All the professors agree that you're going to fail every final exam."

"Oh? Are you all close friends now?" Dazai asked quietly. "I bet Professor Quirrell didn't say that."

"You hate Professor Quirrell."

"That's true. But he likes me."

"*Ahem."*

Dazai and Draco both looked up. Professor Binns glared them down from the front of the classroom. Draco looked away sheepishly. Dazai waved a hand coolly.

Not looking at all contented, the ghostly history professor nodded. He continued, "As I was saying, class—"

Boring.

Dazai melted back into the hard, wooden desk chair. A small glance to Draco showed that the other snake was still silently taking notes.

“I don’t have to write the essays to know that I’m not going to pass any of my finals.” He whispered after Binns’ eyes finally left their corner of the classroom to lecture someone else, “Aren’t they mostly practical exams?”

Daco didn’t look up. He was silent for a moment. “You’ve been improving.”

Dazai hummed. That much was true. In their latest Loyalty Club meetings since winter break concluded, he had managed to cast a few of the basic year one spells successfully and without getting *too* sick. But the handful of spells he could manage were still too few. And even then, he could just barely manage them.

“Not that much, Boss.”

Draco nodded in apparent agreement. “Well, that’s true. I guess you’ll just have to repeat first year over again.”

“Ugh,” Dazai whined, running a hand over his face, “Don’t even say that. I’ll just drop out.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll keep training you even if you are our underclassman,” Draco said with a flick of his quill.

Dazai scoffed. “Well, this soon-to-be underclassman wants to learn *incendio* next.”

Draco raised a brow. His quill stalled over the paper, hovering like a dragonfly unsure where to rest. “Should I be concerned that you suddenly want to learn a fire-making spell?”

“Yes.” Blaise interrupted. “You should be. I am.”

Dazai and Draco looked over to him, wearing matching expressions of guilt.

The other Slytherin was staring at them from his own desk. His notes were spread out before him, but evidentially forgotten for now. Dazai briefly wondered how long they had been distracting him for. Blaise met his gaze. “That is beyond concerning. Why do you want to be able to make fire on demand, Dazai?”

“Aww, you don’t trust me?”

“To wield fire at the tip of your wand?”

Draco’s eyes went wide as he suddenly reached some obscure conclusion. “He’s right. You can’t be trusted with that. You’re too...”

“Too chaotic.” Blaise concluded. "I trust you, Dazai. But even I have my limits."

Draco nodded feverishly.

Dazai simply rolled his eyes. “I’m not going to just go around lighting things on fire, you know. I mean, not most things.”

“You aren't helping your case at all.”

Dazai stuck his tongue out.

Blaise’s lip twitched upwards. He refocused their conversation with a hushed whisper, “Dazai, at least pretend to pay attention in this class. The History of Magic final isn’t a practical exam.”

“I’ve already read the book,” he replied shortly.

His second-in-command opened his mouth to respond, but Professor Binns spoke first.

“Simply reading the book will not help you retain all the necessary information, Mr. Dazai.” The ghost professor intoned with a peeved tilt to his lips, “I would advise you to start doing your assignments if you do not wish to fail my class. Now enough whispering amongst yourselves, you three. That’s five points each from Slytherin for talking during lecture.”

“Sorry, sir.” Blaise deadpanned at the same time Draco grumbled, “Yes, sir.”

Dazai waved sloppily in the professor’s direction.

“As I was saying,” Binns continued to the class, “Final exams will commence during the first full week of May. I expect all of you to stay on top of your studies and to aim for top marks on the exam. Until then, don’t forget to read chapter 13 in your textbooks. Your five-page essay on Emeric the Evil is due tomorrow—don't forget.” With a final glance to Dazai’s chatty Slytherin trio, the professor concluded, “Class is dismissed.”

Suddenly, there was a clatter of chairs and books as the class began to break apart. Chatter spread out among the students. Dazai groaned, stretching out over the chair as he sat back up. He waited, sprawled out over his seat, until Draco, Blaise, and Pansy had finished collecting all their things. When Draco shot him a sharp look, Dazai finally relented. He stood with a yawn.

“How boring. I should take a nap.” He said, slinging his bookbag over a shoulder.

Draco gave him an unimpressed glance.

As they left the classroom, the gang pointedly ignored Professor Binns’ glaring eyes. Dazai wasn’t concerned—he was certain that he would pass the History final if he actually tried. It was the class itself that was a total waste of Dazai’s time. The material itself? Beyond interesting. Especially considering how closely guarded the information was outside of the magical community. But having to wade through the same dry information over and over again was exhausting and tedious.

Judging by the blank stares of his classmates, Dazai wasn’t alone in this assessment.

“No napping today,” Draco hummed, “We’re practicing *incendio* until dinner.”

“Really?!”

“*Really?”* Blaise stop-started, mouth slack, “Is that a good idea, Draco?”

He waved Blaise’s concern off. “You have to give your dogs a treat every so often. Otherwise they’ll start to bite.”

Dazai smirked. “My boss is great! Even if he is always comparing me to a pet.”

“You’re welcome.” Draco replied, confident as ever. “We’re going to have to practice in the common rooms, though. It’s too cold to linger outside.”

Dazai frowned, already disliking the idea of practicing where all the other Slytherins could just walk in on them. He open his mouth to speak, but Pansy was arguing before he could.

“He’s just going to get sick again.” Pansy interrupted. Her face was painted over with a deep scowl. “Honestly, Draco, I don’t know why you even bother with him.”

Dazai mutely wondered if explaining that he hadn’t thrown up doing magic in weeks would help his character much. Probably not. After all, he’d given himself a cold in part from practicing so much over break. That wasn’t exactly normal wizard behavior.

Draco was in the process of explaining himself (there were a few too many “dogs” and “leashes” in there for Dazai’s liking) when Dazai saw him.

Quirrell.

The DADA professor approached them from the end of the hall, brushing through students like a salmon upstream. Professor Quirrell had his eyes locked on Dazai, clearly searching him out. It sent an odd shiver down Dazai’s spine. There was something unusual in the professor’s eyes that put him totally on edge. Something like *I know you know I had a dragon egg,* was burning there. Dazai steeled himself as Quirrell finally came within speaking distance.

Looked like it was finally time they talked. *Really talked.*

Anticipating Quirrell’s greeting, Dazai cut Draco off mid-rant to call out, “Professor Quirrell, didn’t your class just end a minute ago? If you wanted to chat you didn’t have to sprint all the way down here to see me.”

Draco’s mouth snapped shut as he abruptly realized that their conversation had an observer. Both Blaise and Pansy quieted down as well. They turned their full attention onto Quirrell, who was looking a little surprised at having been called out.

“M-m-m-mr. Dazai, th-that's not...” Quirrell stammered, then trailed off. “I-I need to speak with you a moment. A-a-about our lessons.”

Dazai already knew what they had to talk about, and it wasn’t his remedial lessons.

Beside him, the rest of the Loyalty Club shared a few blank looks.

“I was just thinking the same thing, Sir.” Dazai replied, smiling sedately. Though he noticed Blaise shooting him a subvert glance, Dazai’s full attention was on Quirrell now.

Draco’s lip drew up. “We have plans today.”

Entitled as ever. Dazai should probably fill the other boy in on his suspicions about Quirrell before he got himself hurt running his mouth.

“Sorry, Boss.” Dazai said, not turning to face Draco while he spoke, “Some other time, I guess. Maybe Professor Quirrell can show me the basics while we chat.”

Draco, for a moment, looked as though he might protest again. A hand on his shoulder courtesy of Blaise stopped him short. Blaise shook his head.

“Draco,” he intoned, “I don’t think we’re equipped to teach someone like Dazai *incendio.* Let’s leave this one to Professor Quirrell.”

Pansy scoffed in clear agreement. “I’d rather he not light me on fire.”

Grinning Blaise’s way, Dazai could feel his appreciation for his loyal second-in-command grow ten-fold. After having filled Blaise in on the scope of his investigation, the Slytherin still firmly believed that Dazai knew what he was doing. It was a good feeling. And very promising for a gang leader to-be.

“Glad we’re in agreement,” Dazai said with a flourish, “I’ll be back for dinner.”

The Loyalty Club nodded with varying degrees of certainty. Quirrell nodded as well.

Quirrell was being too brazen, approaching him like this. Which meant they really would just be talking. Dazai didn't think Quirrell would blow his deep cover in Hogwarts just to kill him over a dragon's egg. So: talking. A mutual interrogation between mafia members. Dazai could work with that. Kind of.

After a moment, his friends walked back down the hall they had come from. Only Blaise looked back over his shoulder as they passed. Dazai waved a cheery goodbye. Once they were out of view, however, Dazai flipped back to Quirrell.

“L-l-let's talk in m-my office.”

Dazai agreed.

As they walked through the halls, Dazai and Quirrell drew a number of curious student eyes. Dazai tried not to let the attention bother him too much—he had bigger things to think about, but the stares still made his skin itch.

Notably that Quirrell had obviously sought him out. That could only really mean one thing, but Dazai was woefully unprepared to have this conversation. He had known, practically, that it was only a matter of time before his DADA professor cornered him about the missing dragon’s egg. But despite all Dazai's searching, his knowledge on this Philosopher’s Stone and dragon were still too limited for him to feel comfortable leveraging his position. He

couldn't fish for information too much without giving away that he was just vaguely stumbling into this investigation. With Hermione too busy to help him scour the library and Quirrell's motivations still a mystery, the most Dazai could do was to act innocent.

Or he could bluff like it was going out of style, which seemed like a much more *Dazai* plan to recklessly enact.

He just barely caught Fred's eye in the crowd of students wandering Hogwarts' halls. Just a flash of ginger hair among the crowd, really. It was no surprise that once Dazai was looking, he easily found George as well. The twins looked between him and Quirrell with wide eyes and parted mouths. Once their eyes met, the pair seemed to reach an unspoken agreement, and they began hurriedly walking in Quirrell's direction. Dazai shook his head minutely.

I've got it handled. Stay out of this.

Fred and George halted in their steps immediately, faces morphing into confusion. Unfortunately, Dazai didn't have time to entertain their misguided concern. He hurried to follow Professor Quirrell before the man noticed he was lagging behind.

The twins vanished into the mass of students. Then the students vanished, too.

Quirrell shut the office door behind Dazai as the boy entered. The air felt tense—more tense than it had been during their regular lessons. Dazai refused to let it bother him. He may not have had all of the cards in his hand, but that wasn't going to undermine his experience with interrogations.

When Professor Quirrell turned from the door, his face was grim. Serious. *Intrigued, maybe?* In an odd sort of way, Dazai thought that was probably the case.

Quirrell cut to the chase. Dazai wouldn't have expected anything less from a supposed mafia member. There was no class or flair for dramatic among these lower grunts.

"Something has g-gone missing from my office."

There it is.

" I-I can't help but wonder, s-s-seeing as you were wandering near my office that night," Quirrell continued, expression suddenly impossible to read, "If you might know something about that."

Dazai hummed, feigning thoughtfulness. He paused for a moment, as if deeply considering the man's concerns.

Then, in a voice like pure innocence, he asked, "Will you show me *incendio,* Professor?"

Quirrell blinked once, looking caught off guard. Then, strangely, his face morphed into thick irritation. The emotion didn't fit quite right on the normally anxious professor's face but...

...but it fit perfectly on a mafia executive's face, didn't it?

The professor collected himself immediately, wiping the expression off his face without a word. Quirrell withdrew his wand from his cloak and gave it a swish. With a single hushed incantation, the candle on his desk burst to life. The flame flickered, tireless and small.

“As t-to my question, n-now,” Quirrell continued. He tried to mask it, but Dazai could still hear the frustration building in his voice. “A certain i-item was taken that night. It is qu-quite important.”

Dazai closed his eyes as Quirrell spoke, feeling for the how the man’s magic had behaved almost instinctively. He kept most of his attention on the main threat, Quirrell, but still allowed himself the simple curiosity. *Incendio* had been a snap of energy in the air. Dazai’s brows pinched together as he tried to parse out the sensation.

“It can’t be that important,” he said after a moment. Dazai retrieved his wand and rolled it through his fingers thoughtfully. “If you’re only asking me about it *now*, sir.”

Quirrell paused. He watched as Dazai raised his wand and gave it a swish identical to Quirrell’s had been moments before. Something on the desk began to smoke, but no flame appeared. Dazai huffed.

“Try a-again.”

Dazai did. The movement of his wand arm was mostly automatic. So was the surge of pain under his skull.

“I’m only curious.” Dazai hummed, frowning at the puff of smoke curling away into nothing. “That you only bring this up now, if you’re so worried about it.” He waved his wand. "If it were me, I wouldn't hesitate to take back what was mine."

Out of the corner of his eye, Dazai saw that Quirrell hadn’t expected to have the conversation flipped on him, nor the loose threat lingering in the aftermath. He had startled back a step at the blatant nature of his student’s inquiry. Whatever curiosity had sparked the man’s interest in Dazai, it hadn’t been his intellect apparently.

The professor watched him for a moment longer, brows pressed together in consideration. “I had h-hoped the thief might t-turn themselves into me once they r-r-realized the scope of what they had stolen. That they m-might recognize what would happen if the item was not r-returned.”

“What are you going to do, break my fingers?” Father might, if Dazai stole something from him. "I guess mafia types are the same everywhere."

“M-m-mafia—?”

Quirrell opened his mouth to continue, but Dazai didn’t let him.

“Say, Professor Quirrell,” Dazai smiled demurely, his voice all kinds of practiced innocence. He waved his wand in a tight circle and held back a wince at the way his stomach rolled in response. “How come the other professors hate you so much?”

The room went silent. He could probably hear that annoying Angel's skittering paws, had the rat been present. Quirrell didn't speak for long enough that Dazai tilted his head back to see what sort of expression his professor was wearing.

Blank. A totally blank face stared down at him.

A grin worked its way onto Dazai's lips. This was going to be fun.

"Isn't it more correct to say that you were at a bit of a crossroads?" Dazai asked, smug, "You can't silence me about the dragon's egg—" Quirrell flinched, "—because I could just as easily report to the staff about you threatening me. Telling anyone that *I* had a dragon egg would just lead to me saying who I got it from. But you can't just let me go either, can you? Because Dumbledore will have to take action against you if a student makes any sort of accusation. You haven't finished what you came to Hogwarts to do, so you can't risk it all now, getting back at me."

That was technically a guess, but judging by the look on Quirrell's face it had worked. The man looked startled—beyond caught off guard. Dazai took a moment to enjoy that expression. It was a real shame that Dazai had absolutely no context for the nonsense he was spewing aside from a vague hunch and Snape's prickly overprotectiveness.

With any luck, Quirrell would let something slip. Dazai would *kill* for an explanation as to why his least favorite professor was touting around highly illegal dragon contraband. That might help piece of few things together. He couldn't risk being too demanding, though. For much the same reason Quirrell wouldn't break his cover in Hogwarts, Dazai wouldn't break his.

This interrogation, in the end, was built around the fact that neither Quirrell nor Dazai was entirely willing to risk blowing their cover and having to run back to their mafia backers.

"I am curious why you waited this long to talk, though. Were you waiting to see if I would tell the headmaster? I'm offended you think so little of me, sir."

Or were you feeling me out? Reprising what you think I'm capable of? There was no way Quirell knew Dazai was mafia, after all.

Clasping his hands behind his back, Dazai smiled serenely at the blank face Quirrell wore.

"You could always just kill me, of course," Dazai continued with a bounce, "But your position is quite a bit more precarious than mine. I probably wouldn't risk it, if I were you."

If you take me out, he didn't say, *that's game over for you.*

After all, it's one thing to take the fall for something. It's another thing entirely to let your organization fall with you. The mafia was no different wherever you were. The fact that Quirrell had done nothing for days only to finally make this rather lackluster move proved it.

Quirrell would make a poor chess player.

"Y-you are quite a clever child, aren't you?"

“So I’ve been told.”

Dazai gave his wand another flick, feigning disinterest as he chanted a subdued, “*Incedio.”*

For Quirrell’s spell it had felt like a snap, so Dazai made his magic feel like snapping, too. Ever so slightly, the tiniest of flames spurred to life over one of Quirrell’s quills, burst forth from the tip of Dazai's wand. The feather quickly caught ablaze as the fire hungrily searched for kindling. Dazai titled his head back and grinned triumphantly.

A nasty wave of nausea knocked Dazai back a step until he was forced to lean against a desk.

His sudden instability must have shaken Quirrell from his thoughts. The man smiled, anxious.

“A b-bit mistaken, p-perhaps, but clever nonetheless.” Quirrell moved across the room. Once he was close enough that Dazai could feel the man’s breath, he looped an arm under Dazai’s shoulder, hoisting him upright. “Now, if you’ll j-j-just return the egg to m-me—”

Dazai huffed and tried to force himself out of Quirrell’s grip. In response, the professor only tightened his hold. Dazai ignored how rough his heartbeat had gotten.

“Tough luck.” He said, voice hollow, “I don’t have it.”

Quirrell frowned. Almost hesitantly, he released his hold on his student. The second Dazai was free, he clattered a few feet away from Quirrell. The residual press of arms around him stung.

“Wh-who does?”

Dazai shrugged, but now he felt cold. The feeling of Quirrell's touch lingered. “No one who’s going to rat you out.” Quirrell must have already reasoned that Ron was in possession of the egg. They hadn’t tried to hide that fact. “What do you want a dragon for anyway, sir?”

If it was so important, Quirrell wouldn’t have risked bringing it to Hogwarts, where he could be easily noticed. It was also interesting that, as the twins had mentioned offhand, the egg hadn’t been kept over a flame. Which meant...

“You weren’t trying to hatch it.” Dazai said. “You going to give the egg to someone?”

Dazai racked his brain, but couldn’t think of any staff or students who would accept a gift like that. Maybe the egg was a job for this wizard mafia? Although no one else on campus had struck Dazai as having the same menacing way about them as Quirrell did.

A twitch of Quirrell’s eye gave the man away. Dazai realized it all at once:

The egg was in exchange for information.

What was it that Snape had asked during his forest meeting with Quirrell? Something about getting past one of Hagrid’s beasts?

Dazai's eyes narrowed as he rapidly tried to piece together the mystery before him. An idea tickled the back of Dazai's mind, but there was no time to dwell on it. He had research to do —a lot of it—and he was already pushing his luck with this half-hearted interrogation. It was a miracle that he hadn't outright misjudged anything yet with his soft bluffs. Quirrell's reactions had all proven that Dazai's hunches were correct: the man was a threat who had snuck into Hogwarts for some nefarious reason.

Which only meant one thing: whatever organization Quirrell belonged to wanted something that could only be found at Hogwarts.

"Whatever you're looking for at Hogwarts... if it's a productive history lesson I'm afraid you've come to the wrong school. Professor Binns is right awful."

Professor Quirrell's jaw locked. "I don't know what you m-mean."

Dazai offered a practiced, if numb, smiled. He swung his bag over his shoulder and turned on his heel to leave. He glanced over his shoulder, just to see what sort of face Quirrell would wear. "I've heard talk of a Philosopher's Stone recently. Maybe something to do with that?"

Huge bluff. Dazai should probably learn when to hold his tongue.

But something changed in Quirrell's expression. Like a flip had been switched, that nervous demeanor withered away to dust. Blank eyes and a reappraising stare. Quirrell stared down at him like he was looking at someone totally new. Mori looked at him like that, sometimes, too.

So Dazai's suspicions were correct. Whatever this Philosopher's Stone thing was, Quirrell had infiltrated Hogwarts to get his hands on it, probably at the command of whatever wizard mafia he was a member of. Quirrell needed to bribe the other professors to get information about it, because they were all hiding it from him.

"Or maybe not." Dazai said flippantly. He waved, then walked out the door. "I'll see you in class, professor."

This would end on Dazai's terms.

The fire on Quirrell's desk devoured a mess of essays until nothing but ashes remained.

"It seems," Quirrell said just as Dazai was leaving, "We both have secrets worth keeping, then."

Dazai had the information. Now what?

Once the door shut behind him, Dazai fell back against the wall, shivering. His breathing was ragged and the echo of Quirrell's touch lingered still. Dazai was prepared for an interrogation, for backing Quirrell into a corner, for bluffing wildly on the fly. He hadn't expected to be grabbed.

His fingers itched for a knife.

Dazai pushed himself off of the wall, thinking how it was best not to linger. Instead of hurrying off towards the Great Hall, where Draco and company would be soon, he turned off in the direction of the Slytherin chambers. He had time. Plenty of time to grab his knife and cut open his arm a little bit. That would calm him down. Or—

"Dazai!"

"Dazai!"

He startled, jerking back a step involuntarily.

Fred and George hurried across the hall straight at Dazai. Their faces were scrunched up and their mouths were pressed shut. When they were close enough to touch him, neither twin hesitated to wrap their arms around his shoulders. They quickly guided him down the hall further from Quirrell's office.

They maneuvered him into one of their secret passageways—the long corridor that Dazai often used to get to the DADA classroom when he was alone. The wall shut behind them, blocking off the outside world completely.

The Weasley twins whirled on him immediately. Fred fussed over Dazai's face, inspecting his blank expression with something like worry. Beside him, George had crouched down to meet Dazai eye-to-eye.

"Are you okay?" George asked, voice hushed and backed in concern.

Fred nodded fervently. "We saw Quirrell taking you somewhere and got worried."

It took a moment for Dazai to collect himself. All of their fretting must have shaken a weight loose in Dazai's mind, because he found it suddenly much easier to slip his mask back into place. He smiled, hoping it wasn't too shaken around the edges.

"I'm fine. He just wanted to talk."

"But," Fred said, frowning deeply, "he's dangerous. You said."

"Dangerous to you, maybe." Dazai replied. He rubbed at his arm subconsciously, still feeling the impression of hands grabbing there. "I'm too smart for something like that. He just... caught me off guard, is all."

George's brows drew together. "He clearly makes you uncomfortable."

Fred nodded his agreement. “So obviously we’re going to worry when he pulls you aside for no reason.”

“We have remedial lessons.” Dazai’s face heated up. He wasn’t sure why. All this fussing was totally unnecessary.

“Not today.” They argued.

“...Maybe,” Dazai let out a breath, “But that’s not important. It’s about the egg—”

“It’s important.”

Dazai blinked.

The twins shared one of their looks. Then, almost carefully, George said, “He gives off a dangerous vibe to you, right? A professor making you feel unsafe is important, Snakey.”

“You aren’t getting what I’m saying.”

Fred sighed. He straightened up beside his brother. “Let us have this. As your self-appointed big brothers, we have an obligation to worry about you. Especially when a suspected criminal who we stole contraband from is trying to isolate you.”

“That’s...” Dazai stared, feeling numb, “...idiotic.”

“Maybe.” They smiled. “Do you feel better?”

Ah. Had his nerves been that obvious? Dazai took a deep breath.

He *was* feeling better. A little. And the pressure of the twins on his shoulders hadn’t stung at all.

“Yes.” He grumbled.

They beamed.

“Great! Now, what was it you and Professor Squirrell were talking about in there?”

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading, commenting, and kudosing!
yall are the best :)
next update saturday!

Pranks and Chaos

Chapter Summary

Dazai and the twins pay Hagrid a visit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai couldn't hold the egg without killing the dragon inside. This made moving it exceptionally difficult. But it couldn't stay with Ron. No... there was no saying whether Quirrell would make some kind of play to get the egg back. Keeping it with Dazai's only known accomplices would just leave it open for the taking. When it came to the dragon, Ron, Fred, and George were all made. Dazai had a few ideas about where he could put the egg to keep it out of Quirrell's prying hands. But, well...

Hiding it wasn't a problem. *Moving* it was.

Fred and George watched with mute amusement as Dazai tried to puzzle this particular problem out.

"Just," Fred said, "pick it up?"

"And walk it over to the Slytherin common rooms?"

Ron squinted up at him from the bed. He hovered over the egg. "Or leave it here. I'm keeping an eye on Eggy just fine."

Dazai waved off the concerns. "When did you get so attached, Ron? I thought you wanted nothing to do with this?" Ron shuffled self-consciously on the bed. Dazai continued, "Anyway, it'll be safer with Blaise for now."

"Blaise?!" Ron squeaked. The twins also perked up in something like interest, though they were decidedly less aghast than their younger brother. "A *Slytherin* knows about this*!?"*

"Two," Dazai hummed, "Including me."

"You know what I mean."

He smirked. "I do. But he's trustworthy. Promise."

Ron looked like he wanted to argue further, but decided against it. Dazai didn't push the issue further. He turned his gaze back to the egg.

“I’ll make him give it back once we’re in the clear. Don’t worry so much.” He rubbed at his chin, thoughtful. Before Ron could offer any more protest, Dazai asked, “I don’t suppose any of you would be willing to let Blaise in here?”

“In the Gryffindor common room?” Fred asked, sharing a look with his twin.

George looked apologetic. “I think you’re the exception to that rule, Snakey. And only just barely, by the looks of things.”

That much was true. Even with both of the Weasley twins parading him through the front door, angry mummers and glares acted as his reception. Luckily, they had the entire bedroom to themselves. Dazai wasn’t keen on having this particular conversation with a Gryffindor audience. Dazai shook the thought from his mind.

“Well, one of you is going to have to go the Slytherin rooms then.”

Ron’s brows pinched together. “And you can’t do this?”

“Nope.” Dazai said cheerfully. “Quirrell is keeping a close eye on me, obviously. He’s more likely to let one of you slip past.”

That was technically true. It was also technically a lie, but that was neither here-nor-there.

Dazai knew it was believable when the twins began to nod along. Earlier, it had been somewhat embarrassing to have them fussing over him, but now Dazai found himself somewhat reassured. He appreciated their loyalty to his welfare. They made acceptable subordinates.

The twins stood at his shoulders like protective guard dogs.

Ron still didn’t look convinced.

“Trust me,” Dazai said, “I’ll walk you down there and everything. Just hold onto the egg until I can convince Blaise to take it.”

“Convince him?!” Ron squawked, “Shouldn’t he already know what he’s getting into?”

“I haven’t told him yet, since this is sort of a last-minute plan. I’m sure everything will work out, though. Blaise is flexible like that.”

Ron gave him a drawn-out look that Dazai pointedly ignored.

“He’ll love it.” Dazai tried again.

“What the hell.” Blaise said.

Dazai grinned. “It’s the dragon’s egg I told you about. The one we stole while you and the others were off at Draco’s boring holiday party.”

“I remember.” He stared from Dazai, to the egg, to the Gryffindors Dazai had invited over... then back again. “They can’t come in here.”

“Not that you could stop me if I wanted that, but okay.” Dazai said, smiling pleasantly. Dazai and his three pet Weasleys stood bunched together just outside the entrance to the Slytherin common room. Blaise, leaned against the stone wall, seemed to exude exhaustion at the whole scenario. Behind him, Dazai heard Ron scoff. Or maybe growl. It was sort of difficult to tell, what with these house rivalries being so feral and all. “Can you just hold onto it for a few days? Or weeks. Maybe months. I haven’t decided yet.”

Blaise’s eye twitched.

“Look,” he tried again, “hatching a dragon egg is a once-in-a-lifetime experience!”

Ron made a noise. This one was *definitely* a scoff. “Because it’s illegal.”

“Exactly!” Dazai cheered.

Blaise made a face that was altogether too difficult to parse out. He stared down at the egg. It was clutched in Ron’s hands and smothered with a long, red and gold scarf. Were any observers to pass by, Ron could easily hide the dragon’s egg under his scarf or within his cloak.

“What kind of dragon is that?” Blaise asked after a moment.

“No clue.” Ron said. Dazai glanced over to the red-head, not having expected him to answer a Slytherin’s question so amiably.

“I’ve been too busy to look. And no one but me here knows how to do basic research, so that rules these idiots out.”

Blaise looked somewhat appeased by that, for whatever reason. Over Dazai’s shoulders, the twins chuckled. They had *all* been doing their parts, he supposed. Whether that was heating or hiding the egg... Dazai really did have some good subordinates on his side.

Dazai discarded that thought before it could get too sentimental. He turned to Blaise, serious. “Quirrell might come looking for it, but he only knows that I’ve involved some Gryffindors. It will be safest with you.”

“Safest with me...” Blaise repeated. His lids were at half-mast as he inspected Dazai’s expression. The mafioso pasted on a too-large, lopsided smile. “Right. I should have known the second I wasn’t on campus to watch, you would run off and get into trouble.”

“It was a given, really.”

“So you want me to hold onto the illegal creature that you stole from Quirrell, who is a—”

“—a wizard mafia, yeah.”

“—a wizard mafia.” Blaise finished.

Dazai nodded enthusiastically. Behind him, Ron seemed to radiate uncertainty. Quite honestly, Dazai was proud that the boy hadn’t started snapping at Blaise’s heels yet like the rambunctious little mutt that he was. With Draco, it had only been seconds before they were going at each other with teeth bared. Although that conversation had ended in a very different light, hadn’t it?

Or maybe Blaise’s deadpan stare was just too hard to get angry with.

Whatever it was, the twins seemed more amused than anything.

There was a pause. A long pause. Then, finally, Blaise relented with a sigh.

“Alright. Fine.”

He took the egg from Ron, who gave it up with only minimal resistance. In a quieter voice, Blaise muttered, “Don’t let your scheming get too out of hand. Take care of yourself first, Boss.” He and Dazai were leaned in close to one another. It felt too conspiratorial for such warm words.

“Hey, Slytherin!”

Both Blaise and Dazai flipped their attention to Ron, drawing apart immediately. The boy’s face flushed red, seeming to realize his own outburst only after it had sprung loose. Ron scowled falteringly. “Take good care of Eggy or I’ll hex you!”

Blaise frowned, then glanced to the egg tucked up against his cloak. He pointed at it in mute question.

“Oh, right.” Dazai said, whirling back to his second-in-command. “Ron got himself attached to it and named the stupid thing Eggy .”

“Didn’t you name your owl *Featherbrain* ?”

Ron snorted. Traitor.

“Technically, I guess that did happen.”

“Well,” Blaise hummed after a moment, “I guess every pet does need a name.”

Ron’s eyes seemed to light up.

“But *Eggy...”*

“It’s a placeholder.” Ron said defensively.

Well, they were getting on nicer than Dazai had expected. Still, he cut them off before they could start conspiring against him. “I have other things to take care of.” Dazai interrupted, hand raised in mild protest, “Now that I know you two won’t kill each other, I think I’ll take my leave.”

“Oh. Bye.” Blaise said distractedly, his attention fully on the egg now.

Ron shot Dazai a vaguely appalled look. His mouth hung open.

Dazai ignored him. “Just keep it over a flame. Ron has been using *incendio.”*

It was only moderately infuriating the look of fond humor that rolled over Blaise’s face at that. Dazai huffed at the expression there. It wasn’t as if Dazai had wanted to learn *incendio* just to help Ron hatch the egg. He was a purely self-serving creature, after all.

Obviously.

...Whatever.

“I’m leaving.” He said shortly.

“Don’t bother,” Blaise took a step toward the doorway, still smiling very slightly, “I’ll go and put this over a flame. You Gryffindors should go back to your dorms before anyone else shows up. I can’t be bothered with Draco’s yelling today.”

Ron made an annoyed sound.

“Have fun, Boss.” Blaise said with a stiff wave. He muttered this week’s password and vanished behind the gateway the moment it had opened for him. The stolen egg had safely disappeared to its Slytherin vault. Dazai let out a breath.

The hallway was empty and silent. But knowing Dazai’s rowdy subordinates, the quiet wouldn’t last long—

“*Boss?”* Ron and the twins echoed.

Nope. Not long at all.

Though Ron appeared somewhat aghast, Fred and George looked utterly delighted. For no discernable reason, Dazai felt his face grow warm. He grinned to hide the odd flutter in his chest.

“Slytherin politics,” Dazai explained with a lazy wave of his hand. “I’m sure you’ll hear about my Slytherin takeover eventually.”

“Your *what now?”*

“Never mind that*,”* he said pointedly, “I need to speak to Hagrid. Thanks for dropping the egg off for me, but I really need to be going now.”

“Hagrid?” The twins repeated, “Why’s that?”

Dazai made a vague, hand-wavey gesture, “I’m meddling.” He explained, “It’s tangentially related to the egg. I’m certain that he’ll have some information for me.”

They blinked.

Fred smiled amicably. “Do you know the way to Hagrid’s hut?”

Did he? A brief image flashed in Dazai’s mind of Ron and him traversing through the snow in the dead of winter’s night. Hagrid’s hut had been something of a faraway beacon in the field, but they hadn’t sought it out. It had been cold enough that the ice wind had stung his cheeks white and red. Shaking the memory off like fallen snow, Dazai only shrugged. “More or less.”

“Well then,” the twins said together, “We’ll have to walk you there. Come on!”

Without waiting for confirmation, Fred and George began their march down the hall.

“Better follow them, mate,” Ron said shortly, “I’ve got to catch dinner, but those two won’t drop something ‘till they're done with it. Guess for today that something is you.” He made an odd, soft face. “Fred and George really care about you, you know?”

Dazai frowned. That fluttery warmth returned. “They don’t.”

They totally did.

Ron merely huffed out a breath in response. He glanced to the Slytherin doorway, then back to Dazai. “You better catch up to those two if you don’t want to be late for dinner. See you around?”

“Sure.” Dazai said. He waved the boy off casually. Missing dinner wasn’t really a concern for him. Not when Blaise was too busy to pester him about eating.

Missing the twins, on the other hand, was kind of a concern. Dazai wasn’t certain he could navigate the school without them. Actually, he was pretty sure he would get lost straight away. After all, he usually had a guide for these types of excursions.

Once Ron turned down the hall, Dazai looked over his shoulder to find where the twins had run off to.

Fred and George were hovering just above his shoulders like two mother hens.

Dazai jumped back a foot, startled by their close proximity.

“What?” He asked a little breathlessly.

“Oh, nothing,” George hummed, rocking back on his feet.

“Just making sure you’re following, *Boss* .”

Boss.

Dazai blinked.

...did the twins realize what they were saying? Of course not, Dazai thought. They were just teasing him. They didn't know that he had basically enlisted them into his gang or that in the Mafia calling someone boss held a lot of weight. But hearing them call him that so easily... making subordinates was really easy, wasn't it?

"Oi," George said, "Earth to Boss. Are you in there?"

Dazai shook himself from his stupor, immediately drawing a huge smile onto his face. "You know, I take the title of boss pretty seriously," the playfulness in his voice beguiled the seriousness hidden there, "You'll have to pledge your loyalty if you want to call me that."

Fred and George *oohed.*

" We're always loyal to a fellow prankster."

Well... They *did* already run a successful heist together. And Dazai couldn't help but remember how even at the beginning of the school year, those two seemed to have his back. That in mind—

"Welcome aboard, then." He grinned. "You're officially invited to my gang. Street name pending."

Huh. It was oddly rewarding to make these things official. Maybe he should do this more often—Ron would probably accept, right? Hermione, too.

"A gang." George said, "That's awesome."

"Your gang do a lot of mischief, then?"

As they spoke, the twins began to guide Dazai down the hall. Though they passed a few other students, by now most everyone seemed to know about the unusual Slytherin-Gryffindor friendship. They walked down a hall that was familiar only in the sense that every hall at Hogwarts was identical.

"Well," Dazai hummed, "So far our only gang operation has been stealing an egg from Quirrell. So I guess."

Overhead, the twins cheered. "Does that make us the most productive members of Gang-Dazai?"

"I think we should ask for a promotion, George!"

"Promotion request accepted," Dazai said, mock-serious. A large grin was splitting his face. "As joint-heads of the newly-formed Pranks and Chaos division, I expect great things out of you two."

Fred and George applauded themselves over Dazai's head, and it was a good day to be Boss.

Dazai felt a shiver run up his spine.

The wind was whipping through their little group, whistling and howling with the force of January weather. It wasn't snowing this time, but that didn't stop the gusting winds from turning Dazai's bones to ice. The pumpkins growing around them had accumulated a thick layer of frost at some point. Another heavy draft had him retreating into his cloak with a full-body shudder.

Lingering just above him, Fred and George made a worried sound. They shuffled a step closer to Dazai so that they were blocking some of the wind against him. Dazai hid a pleased smile under his scarf at their fawning.

Shooting their newly-official boss a brief look, the twins reached out to knock on the massive wooden door to Hagrid's hut.

"Oh, Hagrid! Please let us in!"

"We have a cold-blooded snake out here who needs to warm up!"

Dazai huffed into his scarf. A smokey plume of white breath billowed out from under the green cloth. He waited in silence, a quiet part of his brain (growing louder with each new gust of winter wind) started begging for Hagrid to open to door. Maybe Dazai *was* a snake—warming up by a burning fireplace was about the only thing on his mind. He thought he might freeze in place.

Just when Dazai was about to suggest picking the lock and helping themselves in, a loud *thud* stopped him short.

Thud. Thud.

The banging, swaying gate of someone large moving around inside the cabin. *Thud. Thud.* Dazai shivered against the twins' shoulders, frowning in anticipation. *Thud.* There was a loud *bang* followed by the door swinging open. The hinges creaked.

Dazai stood to attention. His suddenly straight posture startled a sideways glance from the twins.

The door slammed against the hut's wall with a gust of wind.

The man standing on the other side of the door towered over them by at least four heads. Hagrid's face was approximately two-thirds scruffy beard and one-third puppy-dog eyes. An animal pelt hung over his shoulders.

“Not often I get visitors out ‘ere,” Hagrid said. Dazai immediately recognized the man’s booming voice from his first day at Hogwarts unboarding the train. “Wha’ can I do fer you lot?”

The twins pointed their thumbs in Dazai’s direction, grinning.

“Can we talk inside before this one turns to ice?”

Dazai tried to grin. It came out a bit more shivering than he had intended.

Hagrid blinked down at them. Any curiosity tucked below that thick, scruffy beard melted away and was replaced by weary concern. He took a stumbling step to the side, then gestured a meaty paw to motion the boys in. “Hurry in, hurry in. Too cold to be out standin’ ‘round out ‘ere.”

Dazai hesitated to comply, but Fred and George urged him inside. The mafioso didn’t fight it as he was guided through the door and abruptly pushed into a huge, scruffy sofa.

There was, in fact, a roaring blaze lit in the fireplace. Dazai melted into it immediately. There must have been a contented look on his face, because the twins snickered as they sat down beside him.

“Evening, Hagrid!”

“Evening, lads.” The groundskeeper said. He glanced between them, then squeezed himself into the plush chair across from them. “Can’t say I’m not a lil’ bit nervous to have the Weasley twins poppin’ in fer a visit.”

Fred and George shared a smirk.

“No pranks or chaos today!”

“Well, maybe a little...”

Dazai ran his tongue over his blue lips. They were ice cold and chapped. Once he was sure he felt sufficiently unfrozen to speak without a quivering voice, the mafioso interrupted, “No chaos here, at least. Behave, you two.”

They offered only a fake sounding whine in response. “Yes, Boss.”

“Er...”

Dazai blinked his attention back to Hagrid, who was watching the proceedings with a certain amount of concerned intrigue. Right. Because Hagrid wasn’t a teacher, the man likely had no idea who he was. Dazai supposed all the talk about him failing at magic wouldn’t have spread to the groundskeeper. Most students would never even have to interact with the man, after all.

Dazai thought to wave, but his fingers were still shaky from the cold. He kept them tucked into his cloak and gave a tight-lipped smile instead. “I’m sorry—where are my manners? I’m

Dazai, everyone's favorite Slytherin."

"Ah," Hagrid started. He reached out a hand to shake, then seemed to think better of it. The hand fell limp on his lap instead. "Pleased to meet ya'." Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "Hagrid. Rubeus Hagrid. Groundskeeper 'ere at Hogwarts, though you lot already knew that."

"Sure do!" The twins said.

Fred turned to his brother, grinning madly. "You remember that prank we pulled with the pumpkins?"

"First year," George reminisced, "Charmed the vines to trip anyone who walked by. Good times."

Dazai wasn't sure that Hagrid agreed with the twins, if the pressed look on his face was any indication. He took some pity on the groundskeeper. "No pranks today, I'm afraid. We actually just have a few questions for you, Sir."

The twins sobered up beside him.

A frown pulled at Hagrid's lips. "Wouldn' ya' be better off asking on of yer professors those? I just watch over the grounds and animals..."

If Quirrell thought Hagrid was the best source for information here, so did Dazai. At the very least, he appreciated the idea of stealing Quirrell's plan. He couldn't exactly say any of this aloud, however. Dazai smiled.

"You seem like a trustworthy guy," he said, "So I'm just going to cut to the chase: what do you know about a Philosopher's Stone here at Hogwarts?"

No use trying subterfuge. Quirrell's plan, as far as Dazai could tell, had been functionally the same with the addition of bribery. Now, Dazai wasn't above bribery, but he had already told Ron that he could keep the dragon.

Hagrid went stock-still. His eyes widened to two black saucers, scrambling between Dazai and the twins with something like panicked searching. When he finally met Dazai's gaze head-on, Hagrid's alarm was replaced by a carefully assessing look.

His voice was gruff and low. "Where'd ya' hear that word from?"

"*Philosopher's Stone?"* Dazai asked, quite enjoying the way Hagrid seemed to want to *shush* him. "Around. Pretty exciting stuff. Rumor has it you know something about it."

"Students aren't supposed to know abou' that!"

"Yet here we are."

Hagrid looked between the students once more. A bead of sweat rolled down his cheek. "You forget about anythin' you know about the stone. That's between Professor Dumbledore and

Nicholas Flamel."

Dazai kept his expression blank, but he mentally noted the unfamiliar name down for later. Something to investigate in the library later when he finally pegged down Hermione's schedule. She would know how to find the information he needed. After all, Hermione spent more time studying in the library than Dazai did.

"It's top-secret, that." Hagrid said roughly. "Don't even know how ya' know about it bein' here."

Dazai hummed, rolling some ideas through his head. He couldn't just torture the information out of Hagrid, even if that *was* the Port Mafia's standard. Hogwarts played by different rules. Bribery clearly wasn't off the table, but Dazai didn't know Hagrid well enough to safely segue into, *"do you want this illegal dragon egg my friends stole from a professor?"* Dazai contemplated his options.

Maybe he was getting overconfident, rushing in here and immediately announcing he knew about the stone. Or maybe he was still shaken up from his encounter with Quirrell.

"Aw, come on, Hagrid!" Fred cut in.

George nodded, enthusiastic. "Don't you think if students aren't meant to know about the stone, then there must be a reason that *we* do?"

Hagrid looked flummoxed.

An idea sprung to life in Dazai's mind. He pasted a grave frown onto his face and spoke in a somber tone. "A professor told us about it." That was technically true.

"A professor?" Hagrid's nose scrunched up. "Now who would do somethin' like that?"

"They'd like to remain anonymous." Dazai fibbed, "I'm sure you understand. The risk they took telling us..."

Though Hagrid nodded, Dazai didn't think he looked too convinced. He latched onto that lost expression. "They said that you were about as trustworthy as they come. There's no one better to turn to about this than Hagrid, they said. You'll help us, right? Dumbledore is counting on us!"

Hagrid's beard twitched as he tried to smother the proud smile forming there. Dazai could see the man's resolve was mostly shaken now.

This was too easy. Quirrell was an idiot to think he would need the egg as a bribe. It looked to Dazai that just *asking* Hagrid was going to give him the answers he needed. It was a wonder Quirrell hadn't taken what he'd come looking for at Hogwarts ages ago.

The twins must have spotted that weakness in Hagrid's expression as well, because they both jumped on it like a dog to a bone.

"You'd be a hero!"

“Real stand-up guy, our Hagrid.”

Dazai glanced between them.

Hagrid shook his head. “Shouldn’ be tellin’ you all this...” He looked away, “Dumbledore would o’ told me if we was gettin' students to help now.”

“Not when he knows the stone is in danger from another professor.”

The groundskeeper seemed to freeze in place. After a moment, he said, “That’s not true. He had all the professors an’ myself make the guards to protect the stone after all!”

Bingo. That was definitely what Quirrell had wanted from Hagrid.

“What sort of guards?” George asked, “Charms and locks and protections?”

Hagrid paled, as though he had only just realized what information he had let slip. He lowered his voice. “Nothin’! You didn’t hear nothin’ from me about that!”

“Ah, we just did, though.” Dazai said, smiling blankly. “We’re supposed to know this stuff. I promise.”

“Even if I did know, I ain’t tellin’ ya! Just know the stone is well protected, and no professor is goin’ to take it fer themselves. Not while it’s here.”

“*Here?”* The twins echoed. “Was it stolen before?”

Hagrid shuffled in his seat, looking abashed. “Nearly. From Gringott’s.” He quietly admitted.

Dazai frowned. A break-in at Gringott’s did sound vaguely familiar. No point in bothering over that now, of course.

Dazai booed, falling back into the sofa in a last-ditch effort to warm up. If he was reading this information correctly, then Dumbledore had trusted each of his professors with the knowledge of the stone. More than that, he had trusted each of them to protect it. Like a series of trials with the stone at the end.

Quirrell didn’t know how to get past Hagrid’s. As for the others...

“What’s yours, Sir?”

Hagrid blinked. “What about me?”

“You said you didn’t know what guards the other professor provided for the headmaster. What guard did you offer?”

“I can’t tell ya that!” Hagrid boomed, nearly shooting to his feet. He took a calming breath. “I’m sure yer mystery professor will appreciate ya’ lookin’ into this, but trust me. The stone is safe.”

Dazai hummed. He glanced around the hut, eyes flicking over the various knickknacks and animal pelts. “What’s your deal, hm?” He asked thoughtfully. “Animals? Are you the animal guy?”

“I bet it’s a beast.” The twins commented in tandem.

“Is your guard a beast, Sir?” Dazai asked. Hagrid’s entire frame tensed. “It is! That’s too predictable. Now I'm bored.”

This time, Hagrid did shoot to his feet. With his heavy build, the hut shook at the movement. He looked startled, almost afraid, at having let so much information slip to mere students. His massive frame was a towering threat, but somehow, having the twins by his side kept Dazai’s instinctive flinch at bay.

That was good enough, Dazai supposed. A magical beast posed no threat to Dazai, after all. He cleared his throat, then rose to his feet as well. “Thanks for the chat, Hagrid. You’re a huge help—Dumbledore will thank you once this whole ordeal is done.” As an afterthought, he added, “But you can’t tell him we were here, of course. He’s on high alert for suspicious activity. And with the other professor trying to steal the stone...”

The twins mimed zipping their lips shut. Fred tossed out the key.

“I wouldn’t risk it.” Dazai confirmed. “Maybe just lay low until we’ve rooted out the problem.”

That dumbfounded look was back on Hagrid’s face.

Dazai didn’t take the time to dwell on it. An idea was bubbling in the back of his mind—something extraordinarily entertaining. Something incredibly idiotic. It was great. Dazai spun on his feet with a *goodbye* somewhere on his lips. The twins said their own part, then they hurried to follow after Dazai into the winter air.

It was cold, but Dazai barely registered it beyond the force of the plan taking shape in his head.

"So?” Fred interrupted Dazai mid-thought. “We know it’s being guarded. What now?”

Dazai spared him a glance. “Well,” he said, “Quirrell is going to try and steal it eventually. He clearly doesn’t know what to expect from Hagrid’s beast guard, so that will slow him down.”

George made a thoughtful sound. “Should we tell a professor? Like, for real. Not to pester them for information.”

“Where’s the fun in that?”

The twins shared a look over Dazai’s head.

“There’s no point in telling the professors. Not when they already know about the threat.” Dazai tried again with a pointed glance in their direction. “Dumbledore brought the stone

here so that when Quirrell tries to steal it, they can catch him red-handed." That's what Dazai would do. Snape's insistence that Dazai simply lay low around Quirrell proved it.

"So," he said, whirling on his feet to face the twins. "We're a few steps ahead of Quirrell now that he's lost his bartering chip with Hagrid. That's the first step in every great prank: knowing something no one else knows."

Dazai could see the exact moment that Fred and George's need for chaos won out over trepidation. He pounced on that boyish eagerness.

"Before Quirrell has the chance," Dazai said, "We're going to steal the Philosopher's Stone for ourselves."

The twins blinked owlishly. Then, without warning, they grinned at him as wide as could be.

"Our Boss is totally insane," Fred said.

"He's perfect." George cooed, "I can't wait to see the look on Dumbledore's face when he realizes *we* saved the stone from nasty ol' Quirrell."

Dumeldore wouldn't be getting the stone back, Dazai knew. By the end of the semester, the Philosopher's Stone would be solely in Mori's hands.

Dazai felt himself smiling now, regardless.

"But one thing at a time." Fred and George roped their arms around Dazai's shoulders. "We missed dinner."

"Oh." Dazai said. It was dark out now, and only the lights inside the castle windows acted as a beacon for their destination. "So we did."

They beamed. "Want to learn how to sneak into the kitchens, Snakey?"

Dazai didn't really have the stomach to eat anything. But with the twins beaming so proudly, he supposed it couldn't hurt.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting
im running out of buffer chapters oof

next chapter saturday

A Children's Heist

Chapter Summary

Dazai, Hermione, and the library.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had been almost a week since visiting Hagrid, and Dazai's meetings with Quirrell had suddenly stopped. Dazai supposed he had finally pushed the professor too far—too many tight-lipped smiles, too many subtle jabs, too many questions about Quirrell's various criminal enterprises. Too much.

It was all very entertaining.

It had also been about a week since Dazai had told the twins (and by extension Ron and Blaise) of his plans to steal the Philosopher's Stone for himself. They were ecstatic at the prospect of a prank with such epic proportions. Tricking their classmates? Easy. Fooling their teachers? Simple. But interrupting a criminal heist with their own? Perfect.

Dazai had to agree. Ignoring the fact that Mori had basically asked Dazai to take the stone, there was a sort of boyish charm to the whole plan. A children's heist... It was all quite a bit more fun than doing Quirrell's lessons alone had been. Anyway, it was hard not to buzz with excitement when Fred and George were always grinning from ear-to-ear when they talked about it.

"Do we know where the stone is exactly?" Fred asked one day, hunched over a textbook in the library.

"The Forbidden Forest?" George speculated. "The second-floor girl's bathroom?"

Dazai glanced up from his own book, brows pinched together at the odd suggestion. The words *Nicholas Flamel* and *Philosopher's Stone* yet again nowhere within this book's pages. *Special Ability* wasn't there either, but Dazai was hardly looking for that these days. He knew a lost cause when he saw one. "I have a general idea where it's being kept, actually. But we can't go for the stone quite yet."

At the twins' insistent looks, he continued, "I really need to find some information on the stone first. If it's cursed or something, I don't need you two touching it."

"Aw, we don't want you getting cursed either, Boss!"

Dazai flipped a page loudly.

“Is this your plan, then?” George said. He flicked one of the many books strewn about Dazai’s workspace. “Tear through every book in the school library? If you didn’t have Madam Pince’s favor before, you sure will by the end of the year.”

Dazai pulled a face, drawing the book in toward him protectively. This one was titled *From Egg to Inferno: A Dragon Keeper’s Guide* and was flipped open to a page on the Norwegian Ridgeback. He had, with some confidence, ruled out every other dragon breed as being the one currently in Blaise’s possession. Ferocious little things. Dazai had no idea how they were going to keep it tame once it hatched.

“Actually,” he said, “I was hoping to get Hermione’s help. She knows her way around the library better than me.” He spared a surreptitious glance towards the twins, who had provided altogether zero books to his study search. “Better than you two, as well.”

Fred and George mocked hurt, gripping at their chests and falling back into their seats. Dazai rolled his eyes.

He huffed out a breath, then leaned back into his own stiff,wooden chair. None of these books had any information for him. That made sense, considering...

“In the forest that night, Professor Snape said students aren’t supposed to know about the stone’s existence, let alone that it’s in the castle.”

The twins perked up, and Daai continued, “I was hoping there might be just enough information for me to work off of.” He said, letting an arm fall across his eyes wearily, “But that doesn’t seem to be the case. I should have known; you wizard types are all about keeping information hidden from the general public.”

They sat in silence for a moment. Then one of the twins patted Dazai on the shoulder as if to cheer him up. Dazai kept himself from flinching, but only just barely.

“If you think Hermione will know something, then it’s worth asking, isn’t it?” George inquired.

Dazai let his hand fall to his lap so that he could better see what expression the twins were wearing. He shrugged. Hermione was his best guess, at least. As to whether she actually would have a lead for him...

Dazai wasn’t too sure.

“Well then, we’ll just go and grab her for you!”

“Thanks,” Dazai said lamely. “I’ve been trying to meet up with her since winter break ended. I guess our schedules don’t line up.”

Fred chuckled. “That’s because you’re always so busy running around fussing over this Quirrell business.”

“And dealing with Draco,” George added helpfully.

“He’s teaching me spells.”

Dazai didn’t know why he was defending Draco, of all people, but something prickled at his chest at George’s careless words. Maybe he was just feeling tired. Dazai shook it off with a rather literal wave of his hand.

The twins shared a glance, then seemed to deflate.

“You need to take a break sometime, Snakey.”

“Honestly,” Fred said with a pointed sight, “When’s the last time you didn’t spend all day either practicing spells, researching in here, or doing some sort of high-stress spy thing?”

Dazai frowned, racking his brain. “Er... Christmas? We chatted by the fireplace—”

“We chatted about spy things.”

“Oh. Right.” Dazai blinked. “Probably Halloween, then.”

“*Halloween!?”*

“ That was months ago!”

They blanched.

“Should we be getting Hermione for you, or should we be getting you to take a nap?!”

“Hermione,” Dazai said with a dull look. “You both fuss too much.”

George looked sick. “I’m starting to think we don’t fuss enough, actually.”

“I’m fine.” He huffed as blood rushed to his cheeks. These two were always worrying over the strangest things. It wasn’t that unusual to work oneself this hard, was it? In the mafia, Dazai knew, slacking on the job was severely frowned upon and usually resulted in one’s teeth being smashed into concrete.

It only took *all* semester for Mori to finally give him a goal of getting the Philosopher’s Stone, and Dazai would be damned if he wasn’t going to do it. It was nice to have a goal to strive for. Dazai supposed he couldn’t exactly tell the twins that without explaining his real relationship with Mori, though.

“I’ll take a rest once I’m done playing with Quirrell. A nice long rest into the afterlife~”

“Well now we’re only going to fuss more, obviously.”

Dazai pouted, turning two wide, puppy-dog eyes in the twins’ direction.

They gave in almost immediately, though somehow Dazai didn’t feel like they had actually let anything go. Sure enough, Dazai knew he would be taken some kind of break by the end of the month. Fred and George were hard to shake off once they got an idea in their heads.

But for now, they merely smiled.

“Alright.” George said. “What can we do while you and Hermione are snooping around?”

“Distract Professor Squirrell?”

Dazai hummed, thoughtful. "We need to know what guards the other professor provided for the stone. And just what monster Hagrid brought.” He said after a moment. “Can you two manage that?”

They grinned. “We’ll see what we can do.”

Dazai nodded. He wasn’t too worried about that particular aspect of their heist, to be honest. Already, he was confident that Hagrid’s beast could be felled with a touch of No Longer Human. It wasn’t unfair to assume the same of the other guards, really. Any charms, beasts, or magical mishaps would be a breeze with Dazai around.

But it really couldn’t hurt to verify before charging in there. Dazai had subordinates to take care of, after all.

He paused for a second. “Get Ron to help... Is he still bummed about the dragon?”

The twins shrugged, offering a helpless look in apology.

“Aw, he’ll come around,” George said.

“I think if you Slytherin lot weren’t so tough about having visitors, he’d be hanging over Blaise’s shoulders all day doting on the egg.”

That sounded about right.

“Gryffindor is no better with that,” Dazai said, quirking his brow. He could easily recall the growls and glares that had greeted him the last time he was in the Gryffindor common room.

Fred and George frowned. “Are they bothering you still?”

“Not so much. It’s the principle of the thing.”

Dazai yawned. The twins both looked ready to bundle him up in a blanket and not let him out until he was well-rested. Seeing this, Dazai quickly refocused their attention. ”What are the odds Hermione is busy right now? I’m surprised she isn’t in here with us...” He glanced around the library to no avail.

Both Fred and George gave him a sharp look, entirely unswayed from their mother-henning.

George reached out and shut the book in front of Dazai. The mafioso puffed out a petulant breath. “We’ll go and look for her in Gryffindor Tower.” He said. “Until then, no overworking yourself, Snake Boss.”

“*Snake Boss*. Is that what we’re going with?*”*

“ Right!” Fred clapped, snapping their focus to him, “And then once you’re done getting the books you need, you’re going to take a nice, long nap.”

“Have yourself a mini-vacation until the dragon hatches.” George agreed, “We’ll take care of things until then.”

Dazai’s nose scrunched up to his brow unwittingly. “You can’t delegate *me*. That’s my job.” He looked between the twins, scowling at their self-satisfied faces. “And what sort of things are you taking care of? You don’t even know what to look out for!”

“Neither do you.” Fred countered pointedly. “Just take a break, will you?”

He frowned. “You two are less fun now that you’re a part of my gang.” Dazai whined, thrumming his fingers on the now-closed book. It wasn’t going to have the information he needed, anyway. What was the point? “But fine. I guess that’s acceptable.”

Maybe the twins should get together with Blaise and start a Fussing Over Dazai Club, he thought bitterly, but not entirely without fondness.

Fred and George cheered. They held their private little celebration for all of ten seconds before Madam Pince was *shushing* them from her desk. They didn’t look abashed in the slightest.

And that was how Dazai came to be tucked between two shelves with Hermione some ten minutes after curfew.

“The library has a restricted section,” Dazai said in an awed, hushed voice below his breath, “How did I not know about this?”

Hermione smiled, looking quite pleased with herself. She whispered back, “Not to sound rude, but when you don’t think someone has anything interesting to say, you kind of—”

“Zone out.”

“Exactly.”

In the dark of an unlit library, Dazai let himself watch Hermione. When he had mentioned needing help finding information, he hadn’t expected her to almost immediately suggest sneaking into the library's restricted section. This new “rules were meant for breaking” Hermione had caught him almost completely off-guard.

“I respect the rules,” she had said, looking only somewhat chagrinned, “But I disagree with keeping information hidden from students. We came here to learn, not to have vital information censored from us! Don’t you think so, Dazai?”

As a matter of fact, he did.

...It was all still a bit jarring, though.

Dazai met Hermione's eyes in the shadows. With all the students and professors retired for the night, every torch and candle in the library had been blown out. The spines of books and shelves were made visible only by moonlight as it filtered through the window. At every shift in the light, Dazai glanced around to see if the torches had lit up at a teacher's presence.

A cloud blew over the moon, then vanished somewhere to the north.

Hermione followed his gaze around the library, then nodded seriously.

"Follow me," she said, ducking along a line of low bookshelves.

Dazai, at a loss for what else to do, hurried to trail after Hermione. It may have been dark, but that didn't erase the risks of being caught. The caretaker Filch could be around at any moment with that watch-cat of his. Worse yet, if Quirrell was snooping around this late...

But he really needed to get his hands on a helpful book soon.

"Here it is," Hermione whispered, glancing over her shoulder at Dazai. She stopped before a big door. It was tucked behind some tall shelves right beside Madam Pince's desk, which explained why Dazai hadn't clocked it before.

"Oh." He hummed, mostly to himself. "I thought that was a storage closet."

"*No Students Permitted,"* Hermione read aloud, tapping the metal door-plate. "You need special permission to get in, but the professors are notorious for not gifting those out. Only the *really* advanced graduating students even have a chance. Trust me—I've been trying all year." She reached out for the door. "Oh!" She paused. "It's locked."

Dazai blinked. "I've got it."

At her questioning look, Dazai plucked a bobby pin from his cloak. "Keep an eye out?"

Hermione easily acquiesced, side-stepping out of Dazai's way with something like bewilderment on her face. Dazai waited to start picking the lock until he saw Hermione looking around for any patrolling professors.

It took almost a minute before he heard the tell-tale *click* of a successful job. Damn. He was getting rusty.

"Done," Dazai said as he tucked the pin away once again. He looked up.

"Where did you learn to do that?"

Standing, Dazai grinned. He motioned for Hermione to enter first. This was her big plan, after all. "Just picked it up at some point. After you, my lady."

Hermione flushed, but it was short-lasting. The appeal of finally getting into the restricted section was too strong, and she hurried to open the door. Dazai, who was much more accustomed to subterfuge, shuffled in behind her. He double- and triple-checked the library for trespassers. Once Dazai was absolutely certain they were alone, he shut the door behind them, bracing it with his palm so it wouldn't make a sound.

"*Wow."*

Dazai spun around.

The first thing he noticed was the awed look on Hermione's face. Her eyes were wide and shining, and she looked altogether as if she had just seen a real-life miracle. Dazai saw the books next. There weren't many—just a dozen shelves filled with tomes. But the titles he saw there...

Secrets of the Darkest Art.

Magick Moste Evile.

Hermione interrupted his observations. When Dazai turned his gaze back to her, the bushy-haired girl was looking suddenly irate.

"Can you believe they just... just hide this stuff away!?" She puffed out her cheeks, "Just hiding away magical spells and history like it never existed!"

Dazai frowned. He strode forward carefully, then reached out to pull a random book from the shelf. *Moste Potente Potions.* He flipped through it, eyes skipping over half the words. Only twenty pages in, and there were already about seven detailed instructions for mass-death potions. He glanced up at Hermione. "Not that I disagree," Dazai held up the book, gesturing to a rather destructive potion for melting a person's bones, "But I can't name a single student that I would trust to know these."

Hermione's lips tugged downward. She grabbed the book from Dazai, then quietly re-shelved it.

"It's not that." She said. "But Hogwarts has one of the most well-known libraries in all the magical world. There are a lot of books you can only find here, you know. How are we supposed to learn from our history and how to combat these dark magics if no one even knows they exist! Kept behind a lock and key like this..." Hermione sighed. "I'd rather know how dark our history is than to continue on ignorantly. Does that make sense?"

Dazai nodded easily enough. On a far shelf, he spotted a book titled *Wars, 1500-1750.* He offered Hermione a grim frown.

She had a point, of course. If information on the Philosopher's Stone weren't so hard to come by, would Hogwarts have to go through so much trouble to protect it? All the subterfuge and Forbidden Forest meetings wouldn't be so necessary. What did the stone do? Why the sudden scramble to get it? Surely if Quirrell knew about it, some larger plot was at play. Only the Hogwarts staff seemed to know what, though.

He hated the feeling of being caught unaware in someone else's plans.

Dazai blinked.

Keeping books in here until everyone forgets to even ask what they're hiding...

He walked up to a shelf. There was a whole wall of historical records here. A ball of quivering energy burst to life inside him, pulling at his lips until he was grinning.

Is it here? Tucked away and forgotten by society as a whole... The connection he had been looking for between magic and special abilities might exist after all!

" Dazai?"

"Hm?"

Hermione's lips were pursed. She came up beside him, expression searching. "Did you find what you were looking for already?"

The spines of a hundred books stared down at him. One of them had the answer, he just knew it. That connection he could feel—a shiver in his bones—between No Longer Human and magic. It was here and he just...

He didn't have the time.

After all, Mori wanted the Philosopher's Stone, not Dazai's pounding headache satiated.

Dazai turned. "No." He said, shaking his head. "I didn't."

"Oh. Do you need help looking for it?"

He looked around the room. Too many titles stared down at them, and Dazai didn't know where to start. History? Magical artifacts? He sighed.

...Did he really have time to sort through all of this? On the other hand, Dazai hadn't yet involved Hermione in the Quirrell drama. He knew that she was pretty tough on the rules and hadn't wanted to risk her telling any of the staff about the plan, among other considerations. Or... well, he had thought that before now.

Hermione must have noticed something in Dazai's expression. She took a step toward him, voice calming. "I won't tell anyone if that's what you're thinking. Whatever it is, I'd be in just as much trouble for sneaking in here." She offered a toothy smile. "What are we looking for?"

Dazai watched her for only a moment before grinning right back.

"Something called the Philosopher's Stone. Ever heard of it?"

Interest swirled in her eyes. Hermione shook her head.

“Well, we better start looking, then.” Dazai said with a wide smirk. “It’s some kind of forbidden item, but there might be something with the history books, too. Or maybe potions...”

Dazai really had no idea what this thing was.

Hermione’s smile shined in the moonlight. “You’re saying we’ll have to dig through dozens of books all night? Possibly reading through every single one before we find what you’re looking for?”

“Ah... Why do you sound excited about that?”

“That’s because I am!”

There was a moment of quiet, parsed out only by the eager bounce of Hermione’s shoes. Then Dazai chuckled.

“Don’t overwork me, please.” He glanced to the shelf housing banned potions books. “I’ll start over here.”

“All this studying will do you some good!” Hermione called just before ducking behind a shelf.

Maybe it would.

Looking at the dozens of books laid out before him with the moon as his reading light, Dazai convinced himself this could actually be enjoyable.

“Ooh!” Hermione’s voice echoed from somewhere else, “A book all about forbidden charms!”

...Or maybe it was the thrill of breaking rules making him smile so much.

Good company never hurt, either. Not that Dazai would ever say that out loud.

“This is boring. How long have we been here?”

Hermione glanced up from a book. It was practically pressed up to her nose, though Dazai wasn’t sure if the book was just *that* interesting or if she was struggling to read without light. Dazai knew that he was (and he had a pounding headache to prove it, too).

“An hour.” She paused. “Almost two.”

Dazai groaned, letting his head fall back against a bookshelf. “This is booooring~”

“You said that already.” Hermione flipped a page. “Did you finish looking through that section?”

He rolled his neck. “Yes.” No mention of the Philosopher’s Stone whatsoever. Whatever the stone did, it wasn’t any potion ingredient. At least, not one that these authors knew of. Though they did have the most delightful killing potions. If Dazai ever figured out how to brew something, he’d have to make one for himself. “Have you found anything in that shelf?”

There was no way they were going to be able to root through everything in one night. Hopefully, they would have it figured out before the dragon hatched because Dazai wasn’t sure he could juggle both tasks at once.

Hermione was quiet for a few minutes. Dazai let her read in silence, collecting another book from the shelf to see if it had what he wanted. It didn’t look promising.

Just when Dazai was ready to shelve this one, Hermione said, “I might have something here. Does the name Nicolas Flamel mean anything to you?”

“Flamel?” Dazai asked, perking up. He slid his book back into place then sat down at Hermione’s side to peek at the page she was on. “Yes, actually.” He blinked, leaning forward eagerly. “Why?”

She beckoned Dazai closer and pointed to a particular passage. He squinted down at it, trying to make out the inked-in words without a reading light.

“Right here,” Hermione said. She read from the page, “*Nicholas Flamel, famed alchemist and creator of the Philosopher’s Stone...”* Pausing, Hermione glanced up to meet Dazai’s eyes. “Flamel has made major contributions to our understanding of alchemy today, if this book is right. What I don’t understand is why every single book about someone this important would be hidden away here!”

Dazai made a small sound of acknowledgment before shuffling to his feet. He scanned the shelves to the sound of Hermione talking.

“ Apparently, this Philosopher’s Stone thing made him pretty famous, but it’s since been wiped from general knowledge. How did you even find out about this, Dazai?”

“I could tell you, but it’s kind of sensitive. You’ll get into trouble just for knowing.” He said offhand, knowing exactly where Hermione’s priorities lied. He ran a finger over the spines laid out before him. Every so often, No Longer Human would flare up, leaving Dazai trying to figure out which books were charmed.

Well... they weren’t charmed *now.*

“ Oh! Here it is.”

Hermione appeared at Dazai’s side. “Alchemy books? Good thinking.”

He nodded, grabbing a random title from the shelf. “If this Flamel guy is so important, any of these should do, right?” Dazai asked, mostly for Hermione’s sake.

She agreed.

Dazai flipped through pages too fast to really read them, skimming for relevant information. He would have loved to sit around all day digging through all these books, but it wasn’t practical—not when they could be caught. Not when Professor Quirrell was still running around being suspicious. The awed look in Hermione’s eyes made Dazai think she would join him in the restricted section again if he just asked.

They sat in silence for a moment. Then Hermione spoke up quietly, “The twins are involved in this too, right? And Ron? I’ve seen you four hanging out more than usual lately.”

The way her voice pinched at the end there...

Dazai looked up from his book, his face slack. “Oh. You’re jealous.”

“Jealous!? I’m not *jealous!”* She squeaked, “What gave you that idea?”

At the flush running up Hermione’s neck, Dazai snorted. He turned back to the page he was skimming—this one was about something called a Panacea. “This seems to be a running theme for me.” He said. Dazai still wasn’t convinced that Pansy’s aggression at the start of the year wasn’t some misguided form of jealousy.

“Look, Hermione. You’re my friend—” the word tasted strange on his tongue, “But you prioritize schoolwork above everything else. This is sort of like the opposite of schoolwork: we’re actively doing things the professors don’t want us to even know about. I didn’t involve you because this didn’t seem like *you* thing. Also, we do a lot of sneaking around.” He blinked. “Sort of like this, actually.”

There wasn't really a kind way to say, "I didn't have a use for you before now," but Dazai thought he had done a pretty good job, regardless.

Dazai didn’t look up from his readings this time. Instead, he gave Hermione a moment to respond. He could just as easily put a stop to her questioning here, but Dazai didn’t see much problem with letting her dig a little longer.

“You’re my friend too, Dazai.” Hermione said, voice hesitant. “My *only* friend, actually. Well, aside from Ron. But he can be...” She trailed off.

“He’s not a bookworm like us.”

“Exactly! Whenever I try to talk about what I’ve read in the library, he gets this look on his face, like—”

“I’m familiar.” Dazai interrupted. Sometimes he mentioned his readings around Ron just to rile the boy up. Good times.

Hermione nodded seriously. “I guess what I’m saying is... if it’s with *you*, I don’t mind breaking the rules so much.”

Dazai blinked. Slowly, he looked up to see Hermione’s expression. She was red-faced, but not looking worried for it. She met his eyes head-on.

Oh.

He probably should have realized her commitment earlier. This wasn’t exactly coming out of nowhere or anything. She had said something similar once before, hadn’t she? Dazai grinned over the blank expression he’d been wearing before.

“Welcome to the gang, then. Our current order of business is finding a book on the Philosopher’s Stone because it’s going to annoy Professor Quirrell when he can’t find it.”

“The book?” Hermione asked, laughing slightly.

“The stone.” He corrected. “It’s at Hogwarts.”

Hermione’s mouth parted, but before she could speak, Dazai interrupted.

He traced a sentence with his finger. “Look here: *The Philosopher’s Stone.* ”

She stood up straighter, immediately moving closer to hover over the page. Dazai barely spared her a glance and started reading.

They read in silence for almost five minutes. As he looked over one sentence, then the next, a growing pit of dread began to boil in Dazai's chest.

“ ...*This* is at Hogwarts?” Hermione asked after a long moment.

Dazai nodded numbly. Quietly, he shut the book and re-shelved it.

“Why?” Hermione shook her head, turning two wide eyes to Dazai. “And—and Professor Quirrell is looking for it?”

“The other professors are hiding it from him.” Dazai clarified. He stepped back from the shelf. “We should get going. Before Madam Pince finds us.”

Frowning, Hermione followed after him. “This is serious Dazai.”

Before they could reach the door, she stopped him with an arm on his wrist. Dazai stopped in his tracks. He stared Hermione down until she removed her grip on his bandages.

“I’m aware,” Dazai said with a heavy sigh. He had known that Quirrell was trouble—that he was probably collecting the stone as a job for whatever wizard mafia he was a part of.

Maybe he had underestimated just how much trouble this secret wizard mafia was.

“He’s trying to make the Elixer of Life.” Hermione said, voice grim. “He’s trying to become immortal.”

He wants someone in his mafia to be immortal. Dazai translated.

Unbidden, the thought occurred to him: the current Port Mafia boss immortal. Undying. A constant, aching pain of those eyes staring down at him like scum.

Forever, just Dazai and his father.

“We need to tell someone.”

Like a broken record, all of these Hogwarts students. Dazai whirled on Hermione. “You’ll be in more trouble than Professor Quirrell if you do something about it now.”

“You don’t know that.” Her voice was low and uncertain.

“I do.” Dazai said, face empty. Frustration pounded in his ears with a too-fast heart. “Look,” he turned to the door, “Quirrell isn’t taking the stone tonight. He’s a few steps behind us. We can talk about this tomorrow.”

Hermione was quiet. After a moment, she offered a quiet, “Okay.”

Good.

Good.

Because Dazai didn’t know how much longer he could keep the panic from slipping onto his face. The image of an immortal Port Mafia was still too bitter on his brain. Immortality... it was so terribly opposed to everything Dazai stood for.

He was going to be sick.

Mutely, Dazai slid the door open. He carefully peeked his head through the opening. “We’re clear.” He whispered. “Come on.”

Once Hermione was through, he locked the door again behind them.

They walked in silence through the halls. Every so often, Dazai would hold a hand up and signal that they should stop, but for the most part, their midnight walk went without interruption. Even the Hogwarts caretaker wasn’t wandering the halls tonight. It was just Dazai, Hermione, and the odd weight of forbidden knowledge hugging the corridor walls.

Hermione and Dazai split apart about half-way to the Slytherin commons rooms once Dazai was sure he could find his own way from there. She hurried off with a whispered “goodbye” and a promise to sneak back safely. Dazai waved until Hermione was entirely gone from sight.

A painting frowned down at him. Its golden frame was well-kept.

Walking the dark, unlit halls alone gave Dazai some time to collect his thoughts.

Immortality. The thought made him sick. Dazai couldn't even imagine living forever. Not really. But Quirrell clearly knew what the stone was used for and was seeking it out regardless.

Whoever Quirrell was getting that Elixer of Life for... Dazai almost didn't want to find out. Someone who could be pleased with living forever wasn't the type of person Dazai would ever be able to comprehend. He could go toe-to-toe with Quirrell any day. Someone with that frame of mind was a complete mystery to Dazai, though.

Was he even equipped to take on that sort of opponent?

Dazai sighed, weary, and the sound echoed through the shadowy halls.

To never truly die...

Quirrell's mafia was a scary place, after all.

A torch at the end of the hall waved a fiery "hello".

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading! i love hearing what yall think in the comments :)

see yall next week!

Tea Break

Chapter Summary

Snape: ew i can't beleive i care about my student
Dazai: ew i can't believe i care about my friends

low emotional intelligence solidarity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What a troublesome boy.” The painting of Elizabeth Burke tutted. She had a youthful face, but harsh brown eyes. Her ginger hair was pulled up under a pointed witch’s hat painted entirely in acrylics. “I keep telling you, Severus, expelling those nasty mudbloods will save you some trouble. Let’s start with this one. What’s his name again?”

“Dazai Osamu.” Snape grit out. “And I can’t have the boy expelled on something so trivial.”

Burke rolled her eyes, clearly annoyed. “Red tape! I don’t see why not. Letting such filth walk around... In Slytherin no less!”

“Though I may have him expelled for wandering after curfew.” Severus talked over the portrait, sounding contemplative.

He wouldn’t go quite that far, but that was beside the point. Anything to get that obnoxious painting to shut her trap. It was a wonder why Dumbledore hadn’t done away with Elizabeth Burke yet—or at least moved her away from the students.

Snape turned a dry eye up at Elizabeth’s scowling face.

Eugh.

A torch flame danced overhead, and Severus had to stop himself from burning Elizabeth right then and there.

Crossing his arms over his chest, Snape turned his gaze back to the dark, empty hall. It was well past curfew now. The only light to see by came from the solitary torch overhead and the cold rays of the moon. Around him, the dungeons were cast perfectly in shadow. The door to the Slytherin common rooms was a cold, unopening presence so late at night. For all intents and purposes, every student at Hogwarts should have been asleep for hours now.

That horrible problem child of his still wasn’t in the common rooms.

Why couldn't Dazai have been sorted into a different house? Professor Sprout might get a kick out of having such a troublesome pupil in Hufflepuff. But of course Snape had to deal with him. Had to... Had to get attached to such a troublesome brat.

He wouldn't have to stand out here all night if Dazai hadn't gone and gotten himself the center of Quirrell's attention. Severus wasn't foolish enough to think *that* wasn't still going on, even if he hadn't seen Dazai and Quirrell together any time in the last week.

It all just made Dazai's current status as a missing person all the more worrisome.

"I'm just saying," the painting continued, "You aren't standing around here waiting for a *pureblood,* now are you?"

"Your portrait is hanging outside the Slytherin common rooms. Surely you've seen Draco Malfoy's little group sneaking around for their unsupervised lessons." Snape said with a blank voice. Dealing with these old paintings was such a hassle. "This is not an issue of blood, Elizabeth."

She huffed. "That's beside the point. A little childhood rebellion won't hurt a good boy like Malfoy. This mudblood brat, however..."

"Kindly shut up now."

What Snape wouldn't give to be locked in his own room right now, rather than stood beside one of his least favorite portraits half-way through a Tuesday night. He heaved a world-weary sigh to mask the sounds of Elizabeth's baffled gasping.

"Go tell Dumbledore that a student is missing so he can put on a search party. At least then I won't have to look at you." Elizabeth said. "I can't bear to talk to you when you're like this, Severus."

He pointedly ignored her glare. "The headmaster is convinced that this problem should be left alone." Severus paused, then turned to meet the portrait's eyes. "And I would advise you to quit your blathering now. When my student returns from whatever midnight adventure this is, he'll hear you talking and turn around."

Elizabeth's mouth parted. After a moment, she bit her tongue.

Finally.

It was just Severus and the empty dungeon hall again. And the silent, judging stare of a painting that should probably be burnt. The silence seemed to make the shadows around them darker, and time inched forward at a record low pace.

After another five minutes of silence, Snape started tapping his foot on the stone.

"What in Merlin's name could he be doing out this late?"

"Oh, do you want me to talk now?" Elizabeth snapped.

“No,” Severus said, keeping his eyes locked on the dark hall. “It’s rhetorical.”

He had watched as Quirrell went off to his chamber for the night. Surely Dazai wasn’t with him, then. But Snape had also been watching as Dazai’s little group of Slytherin friends returned to their common room hours ago, and his problem child hadn’t been with them.

Dear *Merlin,* was the boy lost again?

Or... or was it something worse?

Poppy’s warnings echoed in his head, bouncing around and sticking to his consciousness in ways they shouldn't.

Scars, she had said. Self-harm, medical, miscellaneous. It painted a very disturbing picture—one that had Severus hovering over Dazai more than he might have liked.

“We need to tell the headmaster,” Poppy had said, maternal worry turning her voice into steel, “He can get the boy some help. Get him out of that house and into a safer home.”

Then Quirinus Quirrell had plucked Dazai right out of their sight and into his mysterious *remedial lessons* that Dumbledore had taken one look at and said, “No. Don’t interfere.”

Sometimes Severus thought that behind all the headmaster’s genius, he might be better off with just an ounce more empathy. Not that Severus was really one to talk, but at least he knew when to draw the line.

And now Dazai Osamu was lost, presumably wandering the halls after curfew. Possibly adding to those scars on his arms in unsavory ways.

Severus let out a weary breath and pinched the bridge of his nose.

Anytime now, his problem child would deign to return.

A second. A minute.

... anytime now.

“ Is it really such a bad thing if a boy like that never comes back?”

“Elizabeth,” Snape ground out, “If you threaten my student one more time, I will be forced to move you. Dumbledore’s permission be damned.”

She shut her mouth rather quick after that.

Maybe the idiot boy had bunked with his Gryffindor friends tonight. That wasn’t altogether unreasonable. And while it *was* entirely against school rules, at least it wasn't dangerous. That mischievous, cunning smile Dazai always wore made him think otherwise, though.

It was a nice thought, regardless.

Something shifted down the hall.

Severus immediately straightened to full attention. The sound of shuffling feet filled in through the corridor, sounding small but precise. Not large enough to be a professor, but not small enough to be Filch's cat. Which only left the sound's origin to be a student wandering around the dungeons after curfew.

Dazai Osamu. It had to be—*finally.* Every other Slytherin had learned by now not to do something so idiotic as sneaking out past curfew. Severus' glare always deterred them. He wasn't sure that Dazai had even noticed.

The torch wavered overhead, caught in some invisible breeze. It cast the hall into a strange, orange light. The flame caught on Dazai's form in the distance, turning his eyes the color of jack o' lanterns. A flickering orange shone in those usually dark depths. Even from here, Severus could see the dull look in that expression.

Any of the relief Severus had felt at seeing his student return at last vanished immediately. A trickle of something like annoyance burned in his chest.

To think he had been worried! All the while, Dazai was wandering around, entirely unbothered by the stress he was putting on Severus.

Dazai looked up from the floor, blinking sedately at Severus. For a brief moment, Severus thought he saw a flash of fear or surprise there, but it was gone before he could be sure. The pumpkin-colored light was still ablaze, but all the life in Dazai's eyes had been blown out. He looked calm. No—he looked tired.

Dazai blinked again. It was still so slow, like a cat sizing up its prey.

Severus bristled. His eyes narrowed.

"Professor!" Dazai said, sounding much more cheerful than that thing in his eyes suggested. He shuffled on his feet. "What are you doing up so late? Did you miss me?"

Severus clicked his tongue. Irritation rolled over him like a wave. "Hardly." When he took a step closer, the torches lit themselves along his path. "Surely you are aware of the time, boy."

Dazai smiled as Severus approached.

It looked fake, was Snape's first thought. His next thought was, *don't look like you didn't expect to get caught sneaking out so late.* A tiny pit of anger boiled in Severus' stomach.

Dazai was perfectly still when he replied. "Oh no, did I miss curfew?" He gasped. *Fake.* It was too easy to spot the fake, and Severus' frown deepened into a scowl." I'm sorry, Sir. It must have slipped my mind. I'll just sneak past you, then—"

"Enough!" Severus spat. "You—!"

Dazai flinched.

Even in the darkness of a midnight hallway, Severus could see it. The way his student had tensed up completely when he started yelling—had pulled back swiftly. Looking like he expected to be hit, maybe. Snape felt his breath still, momentarily caught off guard himself.

Dazai seemed to realize what he had done, because that obnoxiously fake smile was back on his face almost immediately. His shoulders lost all their stiff tension and his hands dropped to his side. “My bad, Sir.” He said emptily after a moment.

Taking the cue, Severus let himself relax as well. Even though that anger still burned beneath his skin, it was quickly being replaced by something far closer to concern. “Mr. Dazai.” Severus tried again, keeping his voice carefully still, “It is well past curfew now. You are aware that is against the rules.”

“I am, Sir.” Dazai replied. The torch-light painted the boy’s whole figure in red-orange.

Snape squinted.

Now that he was really looking... Dazai didn’t look well at all. The snake’s face was pale and his hands were trembling slightly at his sides. Dazai’s mouth was ever-so-slightly parted, taking in cold and quiet breaths. Taking all of it in... it was no wonder Dazai’s smile looked so fake.

The smile Severus had thought was overconfident and condescending and *fake* was actually brittle around the edges. It was held together by something shaky and uncertain. Any moment now and it would all fall apart.

Dazai Osamu was all jagged glass edges tonight.

Drawing in a deep sigh, Snape willed his annoyance to fade.

“Come, boy.”

Nodding, Snape took a step in the direction Dazai had come from.

Dazai blinked. His mouth parted open as he seemed to grapple for which words to say. After a long moment, he finally parsed out a weak-sounding, “What?”

“To my office,” Severus said, keeping his voice carefully above a growl. The idea of making his student flinch back again... He shook the thought from his head, suddenly feeling a bit sick. “Unless you would prefer we discuss this in the Slytherin common room where your peers might overhear.”

There was a short moment of silence before Snape turned his head over his shoulder to see if Dazai was ever planning to follow him. To his annoyance, the boy actually seemed to be considering the options. Severus clicked his tongue. “Hurry now, boy.”

Again, Dazai merely blinked, looking mutely startled. “Can’t we do this tomorrow, Sir?” Dazai asked, but he started following after Severus anyway. His voice sounded empty and tired. “It’s been a really long day.”

“Perhaps,” Severus said, turning on his heels to continue down the hall now that his pupil was following. He didn’t look back, giving Dazai a moment to collect himself—it was disconcerting to see the usually put-together Dazai Osamu so shaken up. *Just what had happened tonight? “* You wouldn’t be so exhausted if you had been in bed by curfew.”

“Ah, good point, Sir.”

Dazai clapped, causing Severus to shoot a wary glare over his shoulder.

“I guess I’ve learned my lesson then!” Dazai continued, beaming shakily once again. “Stay up late and you’ll be too tired to avoid getting yelled at by Professor Snape. I’d say this has been a productive night. I’ll just be going to bed, then—”

“Mr. Dazai.” Severus raised a brow. He stopped walking, pulling open the office door they had finally reached.

“Right,” Dazai chuckled wearily. The boy skirted around Snape’s side and slid into the room without needing to be told.

It wasn’t a spacious office. If it ever had been, the sheer amount of potion supplies and books would have ruined that at some point. But, for all intents and purposes, it was a clean office. Severus may have had a lot of items cluttering his office, but every single thing had a place. It was an organization system he'd built after years of perfecting his rather abrasive teaching style. With a pointed glare, Severus shut the door behind them. He stepped around a carefully organized stack of student potions and took a seat behind his desk. As he pushed a pile of graded papers to the side, Snape motioned for Dazai to take the seat across from him with a tilt of his head.

Dazai looked around the office, a contemplative frown on his face.

“What.”

“Ah, nothing, Sir,” Dazai said, taking the seat after a moment. His spine was ramrod straight. Tense, like he was expecting something. “It’s just, Professor Quirrell’s office is sort of a mess compared to this. I just assumed every professor was horrible with organization.”

Snape raised a brow. “Hardly.”

Dazai merely nodded. Severus watched as, in his lap, Dazai’s fingers twisted and pulled. He was picking at the skin of his fingers, turning the skin red and wet with the beginnings of blood. Snape sighed.

With a flick of his wand, the teapot on his shelf rose into the air. It settled onto his desk with a *clank.* Another muttered spell and Severus filled and heated the pot. He did this all silently, carefully observing how Dazai watched with curious eyes.

The kettle heated slowly. There was a spell to have it heated quicker, but Severus was sure that Dazai wouldn’t know that. Perhaps if the boy ever deigned to do his assignments, Severus might have been more wary. Even so, Severus let the teakettle cook at its own pace.

“Professor Quirrell,” Snape said after pause, shattering the quiet. He noted the way that Dazai’s eyes snapped to him. Guarded and weary, but mostly just tired. “Is that where you’ve been all night?” He tried to keep the worry from slipping into his voice. With how expressionless his student’s face could be at times, it was impossible to tell if Snape had succeeded.

Dazai blinked, then turned his attention back to the slowly heating kettle. While he waited for a response, Severus withdrew two teabags from the left-most drawer of his desk. He summoned two patterned mugs with a wave of his wand. One was striped green-and-black, and the other one had a pattern matching the design on a snake’s back. Gifts from Dumbledore, naturally. Snape was never one to be so garish.

“I think Professor Quirrell is mad at me, actually.”

Snape frowned, working hard to keep his composure. Even though Dazai sounded like he was joking, it was hard to tell. Especially in this situation...

“I expect most professors don’t take well to their students messing around with their property.”

Dazai’s head shot up from where it was hung over his raw fingers. His eyes were wide.

“Boy,” Snape said, “You weren’t exactly subtle, charming Quirrell’s papers to burn themselves.”

For some reason, Dazai seemed to relax at that. Curious... Had the boy thought he was referencing something else?

“I didn’t think Professor Quirrell would tell on us,” Dazai said after a moment, looking thoughtful. It didn’t sound to Snape as if that was what Dazai had actually meant to say. Something else was going on in that boy’s mind.

“He did not,” Snape said, simply. He didn’t expand. Iinstead, he turned to the teapot, which was just starting to warm up.

He caught Dazai’s curious stare, but focused on the flame he was making instead. That searching gaze the boy wore was more convincing now, but Snape couldn’t look past the panic he had seen there earlier.

With a weary sigh, Severus forced himself to ask, “What do you aim to accomplish from antagonizing your professors, boy?”

“Ah, you’ll have to ask my subor—I mean—my friends that, Professor.”

Snape raised a thin, greasy brow.

“My very good friends and I,” Dazai clarified with an empty smile, “who are equals."

Severus wasn’t attached to the boy. *He wasn’t.* But this was so unlike the Dazai he had come to know, that for Snape to just ignore it...

What had kept his snake out so late? The question itched and picked at his mind.

Had it been Quirrell, after all? Or...

His conversation with Poppy snapped into Snape's thoughts, unbidden.

hhhhhhhhHHHHHHHHHHH!!

Both Snape and Dazai jolted as the tea kettle suddenly started screaming.

Severus quickly willed away the flame, silencing it down to a quiet whistle instead. He shook himself out of the darker thoughts. Across the desk, Dazai seemed to be doing the same. Wordlessly, Severus poured hot water into both mugs.

He pushed them aside to let them sit for a moment.

"Do you want honey?" Severus asked, surprised by his own gentleness.

When Dazai didn't reply for a second, Snape bit a scowl onto his face. "An answer sometime soon, preferably."

"Ah," Dazai said, blinking. He looked distinctly uncomfortable. "Honey?"

Snape felt his patience dwindling. Any of the fondness that had snuck up on him was quickly withering away. "For your tea." He ground out.

"You can do that?" Dazai asked, "Put honey in tea?"

Severus stared at him for a long, long moment.

Eventually, Dazai choked out a tight-sounding laugh. "Right, of course you can."

On his lap, Dazai tore the skin of his left ring finger. His nail came away filled with blood.

Eyes narrowed, Severus watched as his student stared at the sweetener as if it were a foreign concept. Hadn't Dumbledore had tea when they were giving Dazai his acceptance letter? Surely that had sweetener in it. So what was this perplexed look now? For some reason, Severus felt something sick and sticky catch in his throat at the observation.

Or maybe it was because of the genuinely confused look on his student's face at such a small pleasure.

Snape added honey to both of their drinks. Silently, he slid the snake-skin patterned mug across the desk and before Dazai. It was only after Severus had taken a sip himself that Dazai raised it to his lips.

Dazai hummed. He hovered over the mug like it was the only thing keeping him from freezing over. "It's sweet." He sounded surprised.

“It is,” Severus agreed. He took another sip, then glanced across the desk. He was relieved to see that some color had returned to Dazai’s face and his hands weren’t shaking as bad anymore. Wrapped around the mug, Dazai could no longer pick and tear at his fingers. Severus watched as Dazai took a long sip from his tea.

Then, before Snape could say anymore, Dazai’s nose pinched up.

“I hate sweets.”

Severus bared his teeth in a low scowl. He opened his mouth to offer some biting remark or another. But... that flinch still echoed in his head. Snape held his tongue. A roll of honey soothed the lingering annoyance.

“Then don’t drink it, problem child.”

Dazai blinked up from his drink, looking surprised at the moniker. Snape himself was momentarily stunned. It had slipped out entirely by accident. Dazai recovered quicker than Severus could, but the professor found he wasn’t too bothered by that. It was improvement enough to see that his student was no longer looking so out-of-sorts.

“I’m still drinking it,” Dazai said, pouting into his borrowed mug. “Since Professor Snape went through so much trouble to make it for me.”

Severus raised a brow. He set his mug down on the desk with a *clink* and sighed.

He watched Dazai drink for a long moment before sighing. Now that it didn’t look as if the boy was seconds away from a panic attack, Severus could finally get to the point.

“What were you really doing out this late, Mr. Dazai?”

Dazai stilled immediately—fingers locking into place around the mug. He held the tea over his mouth, masking whatever expression was in place there. Severus narrowed his eyes, carefully looking over his student for any subtle, nonverbal answer.

Instead of an answer, Dazai leaned back in his seat, tipping it onto the back to legs precariously. Dazai skipped his gaze across the desk to land somewhere near Severus' head. “Would you believe me if I said I got lost?” He asked, smiling slightly.

“I have a hard time believing one of your friends wouldn’t have gone out to fetch you, if that were the case.” Severus deadpanned. “Honesty, boy. I’m seconds away from giving you detention for the rest of the year.”

“Ah, I’m going to have those anyway.”

“Then you understand that I can make them significantly less bearable for you.”

Dazai tensed up at the threat, and Severus let out a tired breath. Another reaction for the red-flag collection the boy was starting in Snape’s brain.

“I’m willing to hear you out,” Severus pivoted, voice droning and weary in a practiced sort of way, “If only because you are one of my snakes. But if you insist on lying to me, I will be forced to draw the headmaster into this.”

He wouldn't. Dumbledore had made it clear enough that Quirrell always came before the students—before Dazai.

Severus took a sip of tea. Across the table, Dazai did the same.

Dazai didn’t set his mug down, merely held it close on his lap. When the boy spoke, his words sounded carefully chosen. “I really did get lost, Sir.” He paused. “Lost in my own thoughts. I was worrying about failing my remedial lessons all night and when I came out of my head, you were standing there yelling at me.”

Snape’s lips itched into a deeper frown. “So you *were* with Quirrell. In your... *remedial lessons.* ” He practically growled the words out. There was no way Quirrell was really just helping Dazai out of the kindness of his heart. If only he could just figure out what the man saw in this particular student... Severus knew that relationship was trouble the moment he pegged it. And now his student was deep in some sort of trouble because of it—

“I wasn’t, but it’s funny that you think that.”

“Watch your tongue.” Severus bit out. “My patience is wearing thin, Mr. Dazai.” Almost as an afterthought, his eyes wandered over the boy’s thin frame, lingering on the bandages there.

Dazai merely hummed. With the color returned to his skin, Dazai seemed to have collected himself. No longer was he the small, shaky thing Severus had found wandering the halls. That manipulative glint was back in his eyes now, if a little brittle around the edges.

It was almost a relief.

Almost.

“ Professor Snape sure is worried about Professor Quirrell, huh?” Dazai said, hanging over his mug. The steam poured up and framed his face. Severus recognized the smile as the one the boy usually wore. It was fake, but not especially defensive. Scheming. Dangerous.

That sly smile belonged to every student in Slytherin. It was fake in all the ways that everything in Slytherin house was.

It was, markedly, an improvement from earlier. Snape felt the forefront of his worry melt away with it.

Severus drew his mug to his mouth, taking a slow sip of his tea. It had a pleasant flavor with the bitterness drowned out beneath honey. “You already know I am.” He said, not finding a point to dancing around that particular topic.

“Well, it was kind of obvious you don’t trust him,” Dazai answered with a shrug. Then he turned a less-than-serious eye towards Snape. “You think he’s dangerous.”

Snape's eyes narrowed once again. This problem child of his was horrible at magic and was systematically failing all of his classes. But he was far more perceptive than the other professors were giving him credit for. The boy was a snake, after all. Severus just wondered if Quirrell had realized that as well, getting so involved with Dazai.

"I think you should steer clear of him," Severus corrected. "Though I suppose it's a little late for that now."

Dazai's smile twitched as if there was something he wanted to say. He wrapped his fingers closer around the mug, and offered a close-mouthed grin. After a pause, Dazai said, "I wouldn't worry so much, Sir. Professor Quirrell kicked me out of his remedial classes after some hooligans lit his essays on fire."

Severus blinked. Unwittingly, a wave of relief washed through him.

Quirrell had taken his sights off of Dazai? It raised more questions than it answered, but it was a relief nonetheless. The meeting he had with Quirrell in the Forbidden Forest over Winter Break must have shaken the man up.

Good.

Snape hid his triumphant smirk behind his mug. Dumbledore had advised him specifically against doing such a thing, but hearing this, he couldn't help but to feel it had been the right choice. His student was safe from that mess, at least.

One less thing to worry about when it came to Snape's problem child.

"If you weren't with Professor Quirrell," Severus said while returning his mug to the desk, "Where were you tonight?"

"I got lost."

Snape stared at him, deadpan.

With a snarl of his lips, Severus nodded. He reached under his desk to slide open a drawer. Dazai watched with blinking, curious eyes. Severus withdrew the detention paperwork with a practiced sort of ease. "If it's detention you want, boy—"

"Er—In the library." Dazai continued suddenly, and it didn't sound like a lie.

Severus had seen the boy day-after-day rooting through the library's resources. He had yet to figure out just what Dazai was studying. His tastes ranged anywhere from magical creatures to wand-making to ancient, half-forgotten histories.

With a hidden smirk to himself, Severus dropped the paperwork back on his desk top. "Was that so hard, now?" He asked, letting a hint of irritation bite into his tone.

"A little, yeah."

"I see you're just as insufferable as the last time we spoke."

Dazai nodded to himself. “I try, Sir.” He drew the mug up to his mouth but didn’t drink from it.

They were quiet for a moment.

Whatever thoughts were going through his student’s head, Severus could never be sure. Maybe it was the relief of knowing the Quirrell-Dazai dilemma was no longer an issue, but he was feeling worn down and accomplished. But that still left...

“I will need to discuss your infirmary visit with you eventually,” Severus said, voice low and contemplative. He saw Dazai shuffle in his chair from the corner of his gaze. Severus turned to look the boy head-on, only to find Dazai staring resolutely at the floor. “I am not one to ignore Madam Pomfrey’s demands. Less so when they are of such a concerning nature.”

Dazai bristled and Snape sighed.

“Though I suppose now is not the time for it.”

For now, the boy was safe. Severus still wasn’t sure he could even push the necessary paperwork past Dumbledore given the man’s particular... mindset at the moment. Sometimes, it seemed only Poppy shared his blatant concern for his problem child’s well-being. Dumbledore's *Bigger Picture* never seemed to include intervening before things got truly bad, no matter what the problem was.

Perhaps reading the exhaustion on Snape’s face, Dazai set his own mug back down on the desk. It sat on Severus’ table, spilling hot steam from over the top. The handle was dappled with the blood from Dazai’s fingers still.

The boy seemed to be doing better, having recovered from whatever panic attack had been sneaking up on him earlier and it was well past midnight now.

Snape’s worry didn’t really go away, but for tonight it could sleep below a sea of honey tea.

“No?” Dazai asked. The Slytherin smile pasted across Dazai’s lips seemed to widen in the most artificial of ways. “Are you tired, Sir? Maybe you shouldn’t stay up so late if you’re just going to dismiss me like that.”

Dazai Osamu’s favorite food was crab, and he liked just a bit of honey in his tea.

Okay, so maybe Snape was unapologetically attached to his problem child. Those scars, those flinches, those innocent curiosities all had a story. And Quirrell’s interest—

Whatever was really going on with that boy...

Dumbledore’s commands be damned, Severus wasn’t letting this go.

“Perhaps if my student weren’t wandering the library after curfew, I wouldn’t have to.”

Silently, Severus checked Dazai over for injuries. Nothing seemed too out of the sort. No blood, save for the flecks of red on his picked-at fingers.

So not with Quirrell. Not engaging in one of those dangerous habits Poppy had warned him about, either.

There was more to this boy, Severus knew it.

But what?

Dazai offered a close-lipped smile, and it seemed as though the answer would always be just slightly out of reach.

Chapter End Notes

just a note, because people keep asking and i keep forgetting to clarify: harry potter? just sort of isn't in this. i might explain why later in the fic. i might not. we live in a den of uncertainty

thanks for reading, commenting, and kudos-ing! I've been feeling much more motivated to write this lately, and its almost 100% because of the really nice comments yall leave :) still running out of buffer chapters tho lol
next update Saturday!

The Slytherin Loyalty Club Room

Chapter Summary

Dazai stumbles into the Room of Requirement and pretends like he owns the place.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai stumbled into the Great Hall. His head was still swirling with thoughts of last night's revelations.

Immortality.

It went against everything Dazai believed in. The thought of never dying... it was grotesque. Even just thinking about it, Dazai's throat clenched up. Everything that had happened last night—between the library's forbidden section and Professor Snape's unobtrusive tea break—was just a touch too close-to-home. Or... *something.* Dazai was electing not to think about it. Focusing on Quirrell's mafia was easier without all these complications. In order to keep things from getting too out of hand, Dazai had made a checklist:

He would avoid Professor Snape. He would hatch a dragon's egg. He would steal the Philosopher's Stone.

It was a very good plan, Dazai thought.

But for now, Dazai sat down at the Slytherin table and immediately leaned forward to rest his head in his arms. His eyes slipped shut. Normally, staying up all hours of the night wouldn't render Dazai nearly this exhausted, but the added toll of No Longer Human left him completely drained.

It was quiet for a long moment. Even the professors weren't here yet. Dazai sighed into the table.

"This doesn't look like a vacation, Snakey. Shouldn't you still be in bed?"

Dazai startled, shooting up-right. He whirled in his seat.

Fred and George blinked down at him with matching looks of surprise. Fred recovered first.

"You're looking a little on edge." He commented, taking a seat on Dazai's left. After a second, George sat on Dazai's other side.

“I’m tired.” Dazai admitted. It was a more fair answer compared to the existential dread he felt when considering the Philosopher’s Stone. He pushed his cheek against the palm of a hand and considered the twins.

Fred and George shared a conspiratorial look. “Right. How did book-hunting with Hermione go last night?”

“You got back pretty late.”

When Dazai raised a brow, Fred hastily corrected, “Hermione got back late.”

Dazai hummed. “She found what I was looking for.” He frowned to the table.

Another look must have passed over his head.

“It’s not good, is it?” Fred asked, sounding vaguely concerned.

“It’s...” Dazai’s brows pressed together in thought. Finally, he settled on, “not what I was expecting.” He turned to give each of the twins a brief glance of acknowledgment. “Our plan hasn’t changed, though. As far as I can tell, the stone isn’t cursed or anything, so we can snatch it without too much trouble.”

“That’s good. Isn’t it?”

“Sure.” Dazai said flippantly.

Suddenly, three platters of food manifested on the table in front of them. Apples, strawberries, and bananas were laid out beside a tray of bagels and toast. Dazai felt his nose scrunch up involuntarily. At both his sides, the twins started to fill their own plates. A surge of nausea kept Dazai’s eyes locked on the blank space before him.

“Aren’t you going to eat, Snakey?”

“Maybe later.” He said, voice tight. “I’d rather plan out everything for our heist now.”

When George bit into an apple, it squelched wetly. “Uh, no you’re not.”

Dazai blinked. The easy dismissal had him sitting up to scowl in George’s direction. “Yes I am.”

“Actually,” Fred interrupted. He had a finger raised to emphasize whatever nonsense point he was about to make. “I seem to recall a certain snake saying he would take a vacation after his secret mission with Hermione last night.”

Dazai opened his mouth, then closed it. After gawping like a fish for a long moment, Dazai blankly said, “I agreed to that under extreme duress.”

“It’s for your own good.” George said, nodding, “Sorry, Dazai, but as your self-imposed big brothers, we kind of have to worry about you.”

“You’re running yourself ragged,” Fred agreed. He looked Dazai up-and-down. “You look exhausted, mate. Stop trying to wear yourself out. What’s the fun in a prank like this if you’re just going to be stressed about it?”

A prank. Dazai had stopped considering this a prank the second the word “*immortality”* crossed the page of his forbidden book.

He let that irritation bleed onto his face. Though in the end, Dazai really only succeeded in looking more exhausted.

“Look, if Professor Quirrell does something, you’ll be the first to know.”

Fred hummed. “Until then, we’ve got everything under control. Take a vacation already, Little Brother.”

Dazai pouted, his cheeks heating up mostly by accident. He leaned forward into both hands.

Taking his silence as compliance, the twins forged onwards.

“No investigating the wizard mafia, no solving mysteries, no sneaking around... Oh!” George jumped, “No practicing magic.”

“What?” Dazai frowned and sat back up, “Why no magic?”

Fred and George gave him matching blank looks. “Don’t think ickle Ronnikins didn’t tell us about you passing out every time you try a spell.”

“Sorry, Snakey. But a vacation isn’t a vacation if you're sick."

“I don’t pass out *every* time.” He grumbled.

Right. Sometimes he threw up or he got a migraine.

Speaking of migraines, a sharp pain was starting to build behind his eyes. Dazai made a low, dull noise. “You realize I still have classes, right?”

“Oh. Are you taking a break, friend?”

All three occupants of the Great Hall glanced up hastily to follow the voice.

Blaise stood at the other end of the table, hands on his hips and face carefully amused.

Once Dazai was sure that it was only Blaise present with them, he deflated. “Not by choice.”

“Good.” Blaise hummed. He sat across from them, but didn’t reach for any food just yet. “I’m getting tired of having to worry about you being sick again.”

Dazai scowled. “I don’t get sick that often.”

“You do.”

The twins, though they had initially tensed up at the Slytherin's appearance, had quickly relaxed during the conversation. Maybe it was because they realized they had another ally in the newly-formed *get Dazai to take a nap* club. They beamed in Blaise's direction.

"Hey! Blaise is in the gang, right?" At Dazai's brief nod, Fred turned to the other Slytherin, "Keep an eye on him, will you? Our boss is always overworking himself these days."

Blaise merely shrugged. "Obviously." He took a piece of crispy, golden toast from the table. However, instead of adding it to his plate, Blaise held it out under Dazai's nose.

Begrudgingly, Dazai took it. He took a small bite from the crust.

The Weasley twins watched the easy exchange with wide, impressed eyes.

Blaise nodded to himself, looking pleased. Then he turned back to Fred and George. "You two should get out of here. I don't want to deal with Draco's yelling this morning."

They chatted quietly for a moment more. Dazai was too focused on forcing a few more bites of toast into his mouth to really listen. By the fifth mouse-sized bite, Dazai's stomach began to protest. He set it down on his plate. Though Blaise frowned, he didn't say anything about it.

Dazai waved goodbye to the twins and side-eyed his toast at the same time. Once the twins were seated at the Gryffindor table, it was only Blaise and Dazai left.

"You got back late last night."

Dazai shrugged, nonplussed by Blaise's considering frown. Then, he explained the events in the library as briefly and quietly as he could while Blaise listened. All the while, Blaise watched with a blank, calculating expression. His brows were pinched together minutely. When he was finished, Dazai asked, "How's the egg coming along?"

"Who knows." Blaise glanced over Dazai's shoulder, where the twins were chatting quietly amongst themselves. "Didn't those two just tell you to take a break? This doesn't sound like a break."

"Well, they aren't here anymore."

Blaise stared at him for a long moment. The other snake only looked away when the doors to the Great Hall swung open. A few clusters of tired-looking students began to leak into the room. Dazai caught a few professors trailing in with them as well. Blaise and Dazai shared a mute look. They couldn't have this conversation with an audience. With a sigh, Blaise turned back to his breakfast. He picked a strawberry and set it on his plate.

Dazai let out a breath and watched the other students fill in the Great Hall. When Professor Snape arrived some ten minutes later, the man immediately poured an overflowing mug of coffee for himself. Dazai understood the sentiment, and a quiet sting of sympathy burned behind his eyes. A quick search around the Slytherin table didn't reveal any coffee for the students, however. Exhaustion prickled at Dazai's skin like a thousand biting gnats.

Maybe a vacation wasn't such a bad idea, after all.

He yawned.

The potion was bubbling and boiling. It was a vivid pink color and it reeked like something dying. Every few seconds, a bubble would rise to the surface, let out a ghastly sound, then splash a thick, pink goo across the desk. Everything the mixture touched started to hiss and sizzle.

It was Dazai's potion, and it was *perfect.*

" Uh," Ron said, blinking rapidly between his blue-green potion and Dazai's swirling mess, "What step are you on, mate?"

"Thirty-one."

Ron took a careful footstep back. "There are only nineteen steps."

"I'm an innovator, Ron."

"You're—hold on," Ron turned, "Hermione, why are you just letting him do that to your potion? Also, Dazai, mate, I thought you were my potions partner. What is happening?"

Dazai and Hermione shared a look. When Dazai merely raised a brow, Hermione answered.

"I figured he was going to ruin the potion if we worked together," She said, succinct. Then, wordlessly, Hermione plucked a long, wooden spoon from the table and started stirring a softly boiling turquoise potion. "*This* is my potion. That's..." Dazai's potion hissed like a dying animal, "*...something."*

Dazai hummed. He gave the gurgling pink potion a tentative stir. "It's a poison."

Though Hermione didn't look up from her own potion, she replied humorlessly, "Is it really a poison? I think that's just acid."

"Well, it's not a very nuanced poison, but it gets the job done."

Unfortunately, drinking it would likely be an incredibly painful death. Dazai sighed, and when he pulled the spoon out from the potion it was almost completely eaten-away at. He turned to Hermione. "How's our potion coming along then, partner?"

She shot him a friendly look. "It's just another few minutes now and it'll be all done! Ah, Ron, you stirred yours too many times."

“Huh?”

Dazai tuned them out just as Ron and Hermione started bickering.

Instead, he turned his attention across the room, where Professor Snape was supervising the class from behind his desk.

Professor Snape turned his head. His eyes locked onto Dazai’s from across the room. Brows pinched, Snape’s gaze lingered just a second too long.

The taste of fresh honey seemed to still coat Dazai’s tongue. He frowned.

“By the way, Dazai, the—… why are you glaring at Professor Snape?”

Dazai blinked away from his thoughts. He turned to face Ron. The boy wore a pressed expression, looking deep in thought himself. Dazai waved him off.

“He’s more of a pushover than I thought he would be.” Dazai said after a moment. It wasn’t a secret that Snape was liberal with his detention punishments. But Dazai had gotten off scott free despite breaking curfew. The favoritism bothered him because Dazai couldn’t see any good reason for it. A sick feeling rolled through Dazai at just the thought.

Both Hermione and Ron stared at him with raised brows.

“What?”

“Ah, nothing.” He offered them a thin-lipped smile, “Never mind. What were you going to say, Ron?”

The ginger watched him with a suspicious frown for a long second. Then, “Fred and George wanted me to remind you to ‘take a vacation.’ Apparently, I’m allowed to drag you back to the Slytherin common rooms if you try to cause trouble.”

Pouting, Dazai tipped his head back. His potion tipped back too, possibly due to the fact that the supports were actively melting. “They gave me the whole spiel this morning.”

“Why does that sound like you aren’t actually going to take a break?”

Dazai flapped a hand, dismissive. Before he could say anything, however, Hermione piped up.

“What exactly are you taking a break from?” She asked. Her eyes were wide, but not suspicious. “Is this about... last night?”

Ron shot a panicked look to Dazai, who merely smiled. “You should fill Hermione in after class. I was pretty brief explaining everything last night.” He said to the boy, “I would but —”

“But the twins will kill me if I just drag you into more Quirrell stuff. Got it.”

Dazai nodded and grinned at the serious expression both Ron and Hermione wore. “Well. That, and I have business with Draco after class.”

Business being more Loyalty Club lessons. Not that Dazai was complaining—he still needed to figure out the limits of his magic, after all. He was improving, but not enough to keep up with any of the other students. Even the Gryffindor boy Neville, who consistently (and explosively) failed his spells, could least cause *some* sort of magical reaction.

“Does that really constitute taking a break?” Hermione asked.

Dazai blinked. His memory of breakfast this morning rolled through his head. That exhaustion still lingered under his skin.

“This is more important.” He said after a pause, rocking forward on his feet and avoiding Hermione’s gaze.

Before either Ron or Hermione could respond to that, the slimy voice of Professor Snape cleared the air.

“Students!” He called. Every pair of eyes in the dungeons shot to attention. Dazai lazily turned in Snape’s direction, frowning. “That is the end of our instruction period. Bottle your Wiggenweld Potions and bring them to me. Hurry up and get out.”

Beside Dazai, Hermione began to quickly and efficiently bottle her potion. It was a vivid green color now. Exactly what the potions textbook called for. Ron’s potion was almost right, if only for the constant nagging of Hermione over his shoulder. Dazai’s potion was... *uh...*

When the cauldron gurgled and bellowed, Dazai took a reflexive step back.

Hermione’s eyes flicked from the potion to Dazai, then back again. After a second, she said, “I’ll ask Professor Snape to dispel that. I don’t think you’re going to be able to clean it out.”

“Not without burning myself.” Dazai yawned. His arms stung with red-hot pain just at the thought. Fire was one of Dazai’s least favorite punishments. “Good thinking, Hermione.”

She beamed proudly. Then Hermione spun on her heels and hurried to Snape’s desk. In her wake, Dazai and Ron shared an amused smirk.

“If you’re taking a vacation from all this Quirrell nonsense,” Ron said after a moment. “You could pop over to the owlery with me. Been awhile since we walked down together.”

Dazai blinked. “Well, last time we were both there you started a fight with Draco.”

“And you passed out,” Ron said, expression suddenly tight, “That owl of yours—ugh, *Featherbrain.* It's important for a wizard to spend time with his pet!”

Dazai opened his mouth to offer some cheeky response, when something tapped him on the shoulder. He flinched.

Standing just over his shoulder, Draco gave him a strange look.

Dazai quickly masked his discomfort behind a grin. “Draco, fancy seeing you here.” He said, “I thought you were allergic to the Gryffindor side of the classroom?”

“Funny.” Draco deadpanned. Then, he turned a glare onto Ron. It was a complete 180—from blank amusement to open disgust. “Run along, Weasley. We have Slytherin business to attend to.”

Looking between them, Dazai smiled amicably. He waved when Blaise and Pansy came up from behind Draco. Only Blaise waved back. Pansy, looking distinctly annoyed, rolled her eyes and saddled up on Draco’s right side.

“Why are you still talking to this blood traitor scum, Draco? Just grab your pet project and let’s go.”

Ron’s expression darkened.

Sensing that they were seconds away from a full-on brawl, Dazai interrupted with a chuckle. “I feel I should remind at least one of you that we’re still in the Potions classroom. Also that Professor Snape is like ten feet away from us and he'll definitely notice if you try to kill one another.”

Dazai didn’t look, but it wasn’t a stretch to say the potions master was probably watching them right now. Snape had been shooting him surreptitious glances all through class, after all. Dazai rolled his shoulders, hoping to dispel some of the tension there. Blaise shot him a dull look.

Draco blinked, then cleared his throat. Abruptly, he stood up taller, looking the image of poised and collected despite the fact that mere seconds ago he had looked ready to pounce. “I suppose, for once, that Dazai is right.”

“I try, Boss.”

“Come on, Dazai.” Draco said, still scowling in Ron’s direction.

Dazai shot Ron what he thought might have been an apologetic look. He stepped in behind Blaise, anyway. They were right—he needed to practice his magic more than he needed to galivant around the castle with Ron. Forget the twins' forced vacation—this was just more practical. And another step closer to being useful for the Port Mafia.

Probably. Assuming magical talent was what Mori was hoping he would get out of the year. The jury was still out on that one, no thanks to Mori's endlessly vague instruction.

Dazai let out a breath. He waved a casual hand to Ron before turning to follow Draco, Pansy, and Blaise out of the classroom. Just as he was turning, Dazai saw Hermione return to their workstation. She said something quietly to Ron, who shook his head.

Running a hand through his hair, Dazai let out a yawn as he walked out the classroom doors. His hair was really getting too long. Dark brown curls tucked around his ears and bunched up

over the nape of his neck. Dazai would need to start combing it soon, otherwise it would matt. Usually, he was content to just run a hand through it. But now—

“It’s going to be too cold outside to practice spells,” Blaise said, interrupting the mafioso’s wayward thoughts. Dazai blinked, letting his hand drop to his side. “Draco.”

“I know that.” Draco snapped. He guided the group through the halls and past a string of classrooms. A few dozen upper-classmen that Dazai didn’t recognize were walking out of them. “That’s why we’re going to the common rooms. No one will bother us there—they know who my father is.”

Dazai snorted.

Blaise made a face, then glanced at Dazai. “That’s not a great idea.”

“No?” Draco asked.

Pansy’s lip curled. “Why not?”

Dazai was about to add his own question into the mix when it dawned on him: the dragon egg. It was in the Slytherin common rooms. Blaise had been doing a great job of hiding it thus far, but if the Loyalty Club was poking around in there all afternoon? It was almost certain that they would stumble into it.

Pansy and Draco... No. Dazai didn’t trust them enough with this.

Thinking fast, Dazai hummed. “We’re still practicing *incendio,* aren’t we? I guess if you don’t mind me casting it right over your bed, then—”

Draco paled. “We’ll practice over your bed, obviously.”

Blaise raised a hand, halting the conversation easily. “Absolutely not.”

“Not outside, not in the common rooms...” Pansy glowered, “Where else are we going to go?” She whirled on Draco, “Let’s ditch the mudblood already and do something more fun. Like bullying a different mudblood.”

“Charming as always, Pansy.” Dazai chimed in.

“No.” Draco said. “I owe it to Dazai to make him functional. You’ve seen his spell work, Pansy. It's abysmal. He still needs a lot of work.”

“Your cruel words only make me want to work harder, Boss.”

At Dazai’s side, Blaise made an amused sound.

They were quiet for a moment. Dazai didn’t mind—following behind Draco was easy compared to the complicated planning that came with starting a gang. It didn’t help that his gang’s first order of business was as ambitious as destroying a rival mafia, but Dazai had

only ever been an overachiever in the worst of ways. On good conscious, Dazai couldn't let someone attain immortality. It rankled something deep in him to even consider.

Draco guided the club up a flight of moving stairs, saying something about finding an empty classroom. The floor they got off at was vaguely familiar to Dazai. He looked down the long hall, a smile quirking on his lips.

"Aren't the Gryffindor dorms down there?" He asked with a smothered yawn, "Planning to cause some trouble, Boss?"

Pansy glowered. "Of course you don't know how to navigate Hogwarts, but you know where to find the Gryffindors."

Draco shot him a look. "As if I would ever willingly visit those blood traitors in their little den." He kept walking, pushing onward down a hall Dazai was unfamiliar with. "Besides, I just got that Weasley off our backs. I don't need to get his brothers trying to convert you, too."

"Convert?" Dazai smirked. He wondered what Draco would say if he knew Ron had been calling him an *honorary Gryffindor. "* No, no. I'm converting them, remember?"

"Right." Draco said. "The only evidence I've seen of that is those twins hovering over you."

"Like guard dogs," Dazai agreed. "I decided I wanted protection, so I've enlisted them, obviously."

In reality, he couldn't get Fred and George to stop mothering him, but Draco didn't need to know that. Dazai smiled thinly.

Looking between them, Blaise sighed. He turned his eyes to the doors lining the corridor, but they all seemed to be occupied by classes at the moment. Draco caught his gaze.

He sobered up. "No, Dazai. We aren't bullying anyone right now." Draco scowled at a classroom after a quick look revealed it was still in use. "We need a big, empty classroom so you don't accidentally blow anything up."

"As if he could manage that."

Blaise hummed. "Nothing flammable," he added, "maybe a couch, for when he gets sick."

"No couch," Dazai countered, "because I don't get sick."

"A couch." Draco nodded in agreement, half-a-pace ahead of them, "And a desk so I can work on my homework while Dazai gets sick on the couch."

When Pansy snorted, Dazai glared in her direction.

With a pout, Dazai said, "While we're inventing the perfect training room, I also want a big, open window to jump out of—why did we stop?"

At the front of the group, Draco had come to a full stop. His feet were planted on the stone floor, unmoving. Leaning forward to get a better look at his face, Dazai found Draco's expression to be scrunched up in confusion. Pansy wore a similar expression, and Blaise's uncertainty was the subdued sort it always was.

Frowning, Dazai looked around.

"That door." Draco said, finally answering his question. He pointed towards a tall door at the end of the hall, but it looked just like every other door in the school to Dazai. "It's not supposed to be there."

Dazai looked between his friends, frowning at their uncomprehending expressions. "How can you even tell?" He asked, nose scrunched up.

"Because," Blaise gave him a look, "This is meant to be an empty hall. And there's usually a tapestry right there."

"Not that you would know," Pansy crowed.

Dazai raised a brow. "I *don't* know," He said, eyeing the supposedly mysterious door, "And neither do you. I feel like we've already established that Hogwarts doesn't make any sense and that it's a navigational nightmare."

Pansy glared at him. "No one thinks that but you."

"You definitely should—it's a wonder Slytherin has any braincells left at all."

There was a long moment of silence. They stared at the door with varying measures of perplexion. Dazai, despite how frequently magic through him for a loop, was seemingly the least confused of the bunch. When it came to navigating this awful school, every door was novel to him. And more than that, compared to the Philosopher's Stone? A mysterious door was kind of underwhelming.

"Hey," Dazai said. He skipped past Blaise, Pansy, and Draco, heading straight towards the magic door. "Maybe it's empty. Let's check, Boss."

As Dazai brazenly reached for the door, Draco suddenly shot to life once again. "No! Are you an idiot, Dazai? Don't you know that you shouldn't just touch random magical artefacts! What if it's cursed?!"

Dazai snorted, but dropped his hand to his side regardless. "I highly doubt that will be a problem." Although he might nullify it out of existence, and that would be no fun. "Pansy should open it then, since it doesn't matter if she gets cursed."

Pansy bristled.

Beside her, Blaise merely hummed. He seemed to be thinking deeply about something. Dazai stared at the boy for a brief moment. Blaise caught his gaze and sighed.

"I agree." He said. "I think we should open it."

“This is probably trespassing.” Pansy growled at Blaise as the snake finally followed Dazai to the door. “I bet the professors keep it behind a tapestry for a reason.”

“The forest and that part of the third floor are the only things off-limits,” Dazai contested. He stepped back, letting Blaise inspect the door. “The headmaster never mentioned anything about mysterious doors on the seventh floor. Hey,” Dazai turned to grin in Draco’s direction, “Maybe there are some Gryffindor secrets back here.”

Maybe it was the prospect of bullying or maybe it was the way both Blaise and Dazai were eager to open the door, but only a few seconds later Draco was joining them, too.

“You’ve got to be kidding me. Draco! You can’t be humoring Dazai, of all people.”

“I’m not,” Draco said. “I’m humoring myself. Besides, I bet my father would like to hear about a mysterious room that isn’t known to the students. It’s a hazard, is what it is! What if some unsuspecting fool gets themself locked in there?!”

“Like us?” Blaise intoned.

Dazai cheered, and it was only a second more before Pansy joined them by the door. He shot her a grin, but only received a scathing glare in return. Dazai was sure that had Draco initially suggested this plan, she would have accepted it immediately. Oh well—he didn’t want Pansy in his gang anyway. She didn’t need to trust him, just stay out of his way.

With a final sweeping glance around the empty halls, Draco gripped the knob of the mysterious seventh-floor door and swung it open.

A gust of dusty wind bellowed out from it, sucked from the room with a wash of pressure. Dazai had to squint against it. His nose bunched up to stifle a sneeze. He blinked to clear the dust, then peered around Draco’s arm to peek inside the room.

“It’s...” he spoke first. When the exact words seemed to fail him, Dazai whirled on Draco. “*Huh.* Did you get better magic since last class?”

Draco blinked and woke from his temporary stupor. He didn’t even spare Dazai a glance, instead stepping into the space behind the door.

It was a large, open space. Stone floors with tall, arching ceilings overhead. In the middle of the room, a long, wooden desk sat oppressively. Dazai couldn’t help but to see his father siting there, if only just for a second. Blinking a few times cleared the image from his eyes, but Dazai looked away anyway. There was a sofa to the side of the desk. It had plush-looking, purple cushions and was just wide enough to fit four students.

It was exactly what they had been looking for. *Exactly.*

Dazai didn’t’ know why he bothered being surprised with magic anymore. He crossed the threshold after Draco and was only mildly surprised when the room didn’t nullify around them. Still, the second he passed into the room No Longer Human started buzzing. A sharp

pain lanced through the base of his skull. Dazai rubbed at the back of his neck, hoping to soothe his agitated ability.

When Dazai turned over his shoulder, he saw Pansy then Blaise enter as well. Blaise shut the door behind them precisely.

“Wha—” Pansy blinked, carefully walking around the room with wide, searching eyes. When she spotted the large, stain-glass window on the far wall, her mouth gaped open. “*How?!”*

Leaning forward to inspect the window, Dazai was deeply disappointed to see that it wasn’t the type that could be opened. It cast a long, rainbow shatter of light across the entire space, painting the desk and floor. Curious—Dazai couldn’t recall there being a huge stain glass window on this side of the Hogwarts' exterior. When he rapped a knuckle against the glass, the echo sounded more like that of stone. No Longer Human kicked up in protest. Dazai turned back to the others, rolling on his heels and grinning widely.

The others had mostly fanned out by now. Draco, who was standing over the desk, spoke first. “What is this place?”

Blaise rolled up to Dazai’s side. “It looks like a room with everything we needed.” He turned a curious eye to Dazai. “Except for your window.”

Dazai shrugged.

“Why was it hidden behind the tapestry?” Pansy asked, for once not sounding ready to bite, “Or—why wasn’t the tapestry there today?”

They all met each other's eyes.

“It has to be magic, right?” Draco asked. “I must have made the room with magic. I wanted to find this place so badly, my incredibly sophisticated magic made it for us. You're welcome.”

“Why did *you* have to make it? Maybe it was Blaise. Anyway, it’s probably just a Hogwarts thing.” Dazai countered easily. He started walking until he was standing at the desk beside Draco. Shortly after, both Blaise and Pansy joined them. Once they were all together, Dazai shrugged again. “It’s definitely made of magic, though.”

No Longer Human hummed in agreement, and Dazai had to hold back a wince at the uncomfortable sensation. Whatever this room was, his ability kept trying and failing to negate it entirely.

A room that isn’t always visible, but appears when you have a specific location in mind? Dazai frowned to himself—that didn’t seem quite right. They hadn’t really expected to find a room like this, after all.

No—they had just wanted it.

Dazai hummed and looked around the room, ignoring the curious looks he was getting. Yup, definitely magic. And—curious at this was—it wasn’t really a bad thing. Compared to the

latest magical revelation Dazai had, a room that gave them everything they wanted? Not the most stressful thing he had to deal with. He clapped.

Beaming, Dazai said, “Does this mean we have a club room, Boss?”

Draco blinked. Then, a smirk split onto his face as well. “For the last time, Dazai, we aren’t a club.”

“We *are* kind of a club.” Blaise said.

Leaning forward, Draco poked Dazai’s bookbag. “Enough talking. I made us this great practice room—”

“You didn’t make it, Boss.”

“—so we better use it. Wand up, Dazai. Today we’re practicing *incendio.* ”

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting :)
See yall next week

Smokescreen

Chapter Summary

Dazai is very smart! He's also kind of an idiot.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You look like you're going to be sick.”

Dazai shot an unamused glance in Draco’s general direction.

It was true—his stomach was spinning with nausea and his head was stuffed full of cotton. It had only been a few weeks of practicing spells in their new Loyalty Club room, and Dazai had noticed a disturbing trend. Having to cast spells was one thing, but doing it while No Longer Human tried to fight against their magic room? Completely different set of circumstances.

He wasn’t quite back to square one, if the absence of flames coming from his wand was any indication. But the magic-induced weakness was as bad as ever. Dazai dropped his wand to his side.

“I’m fine,” he said, but didn’t make another attempt to cast *incendio.* He squinted at the desk when No Longer Human spiked again. “This is what I normally look like.”

Blaise raised a brow. “Like you’re about to fall over?”

“Uh, yes?”

Draco made an unimpressed sound. “I don’t want a repeat of last time you looked this bad.” Right—when they had to carry him to the infirmary. Dazai didn’t want that either. “I guess you *have* been practicing for a while. Go lay down on the fainting couch and we can pick this up when you aren't swaying on your feet.”

The so-called “fainting couch” was actually just a sofa, but the sheer number of times Dazai had practically passed out on it had rendered it as such early on. Dazai sighed.

He didn’t argue the point this time. Instead, the mafioso shuffled across the room, then collapsed into a heap on the sofa. The plush pillows seemed to suck him in, and Dazai briefly considered never moving again. Suffocating against a cushion this soft would be a pleasant sort of death, he thought. Darkness touched the edge of his vision, begging to pull him under.

“Draco, what did you put for question five?”

Dazai groaned into the cushion. If he was going to commit suicide, he wasn't going to do it with Pansy's voice in the background. He rolled onto his side to see Pansy, Blaise, and Draco sitting around the desk.

Various papers and books were scattered across the surface. Draco twirled an inky quill in his fingers as he scowled down at the open textbook in front of him. Dazai's eyes thinned as he tried to make out what assignment they were working on. That looked like the history textbook. Dazai sighed, and his mouth felt cold. He had to close his eyes when the world started turning like a Yokohama sea.

"Uh," Draco hummed. Dazai heard the sound of rustling papers. "Something about goblins? A goblin strike?"

"Gargoyle Strike of 1911," Dazai grumbled into the cushion. It ate up the words and slurred his tongue.

The sound of papers shuffling stopped. Dazai squinted open an eye to see Draco and Pansy staring at him with wide, disbelieving eyes. Only Blaise didn't turn away from his assignment. Instead, Blaise looked distantly amused.

Draco narrowed his eyes. "How do you know that?"

"Context clues?" Dazai shrugged. Even that slight movement had his stomach roiling in protest. "There's nothing about a goblin strike in the textbook."

"Yeah, but—"

Pansy cut him off, "But you're an idiot."

When he saw Draco nodding along, Dazai let his eyes slip shut once again. The darkness settled his headache somewhat.

They were silent for a moment. Then, the sound of shuffling papers returned. Dazai thought it sounded like someone was rapidly flipping through a book, but he couldn't bring himself to look. After a few seconds, Draco made a surprised noise.

"He's right!"

"Of course I'm right," Dazai said at the exact same moment Blaise cut in, "Of course he's right,"

When Dazai didn't say any more, Blaise said, "Dazai read all the textbooks ages ago."

"He also sleeps through class!"

Tap—a quill on paper. Dazai's head echoed with pain.

"Everyone sleeps through history, Draco."

“That’s...” Draco trailed off. “True. Okay, fine. But I’ve *seen* Dazai take tests! He just doodles on them!”

For a second, Blaise didn’t reply. When he did, the boy sounded exasperated. “*Dazai.”*

Dazai groaned. “What? Tests are boring, don’t give me that look, Blaise.”

Tap. Tap.

Dazai’s head pounded.

“Your eyes are closed.”

“I can feel the judgement, anyway.”

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Someone was still tapping their quill on the table. Dazai’s brows scrunched together, and after a long moment he finally forced his eyes open. There was a snarl on his tongue when he did. The obnoxious, repetitive sound was only making his skull pound sharper.

Pansy was glaring at him from over the rim of her textbook. Dazai was too tired to glare, but his empty stare usually worked well enough. The quill in Pansy’s hand stalled just above a page.

“What kind of wand did Emeric the Evil have?” She quizzed.

Dazai blinked sluggishly. “Didn’t we just have an essay on this guy? Pansy already forgot...”

Before she could throw the quill at him (her arm was arched back, ready), Dazai let out a breathy sigh. At least she wasn't tapping anymore—couldn't she see even the smallest of sounds would make his head hurt? “Alder wood with unicorn hair. Nine-inches.”

While Pansy frantically flipped through the book to check his answer, Dazai turned to Blaise.

“Don’t write that down.” Dazai stage-whispered, “I’m lying.”

Blaise made a face. “What is it really?”

“That was Professor Quirrell's wand.” He hummed. “It’s really elder and thestral tail hair. It's a pretty fancy wand, actually. Much cooler than my blackthorn wand... Probably not as pointy though.”

Blaise nodded, and started writing immediately. Dazai felt a small thrum of appreciation run through him when Blaise easily accepted the answer as being correct. Pansy, on the other hand, was fuming. She was still flipping through the book, obviously searching for something to disprove.

She wouldn't find anything, of course. Dazai knew that book cover-to-cover. Hell, he could even tell her what page to look on.

But Pansy's frustrated face... no. That was too amusing. He would let her struggle for a little longer.

Dazai grinned into the pillow. He was just letting his eyes fall closed again when—

"Wait..."

The mafioso blinked. Draco was looking between him and Blaise with wide eyes.

"...Are you actually smart?" He asked, mouth dropped open. "It can't be! Dazai, you're failing every single class! He must be—be reading the book somehow!"

Dazai yawned. "Everything is spinning, Boss."

If he tried reading right now, Dazai was convinced he would actually throw up. Just thinking about it made his vision waver. Dazai closed his eyes and pressed closer into the sofa reflexively.

"That's not possible," Draco continued, looking aghast.

The voice grated on Dazai's ears, but pushing further into the sofa didn't help except to make breathing more difficult. Sedately, Dazai opened an eye. It was still difficult to parse out, but he could see the way Draco's brows were pinched together. "Draco doesn't have any faith in me. I should just die now—"

Blaise made a thoughtful sound. "Take a nap, Dazai."

"Okay."

That sounded like a great idea, actually. The world was spinning—or was it rocking him to sleep? Dazai yawned into a pillow.

After a moment, Dazai heard Draco hum. "All that time in the library, he was actually studying?" He must have been talking to Blaise—Dazai was fairly certain Pansy would have nothing but unkind things to say to a question like that. "Like, class stuff."

"Sure," Blaise said. There was a rustle of clothes, and Dazai thought the boy was probably shrugging.

Of course, Blaise was the only one in this room who was aware of what sort of things Dazai really studied. A little bit of everything, but most recently the ever-dangerous topic of the Philosopher's Stone.

"Huh." Draco's voice was flat and considering.

Blaise hummed. "I think writing it down just bores him."

Dazai let out a breath and melted into the couch. He didn't really care what Draco thought of him. Honestly, it was a bit of a surprise that the boy hadn't picked up on Dazai's genius by now. He didn't spend all of his free time in the library for no reason, after all.

Dazai did hate regurgitating the information on paper, though.

The plush cushions of Dazai's sofa seemed to be pulling him in. He was just starting to humor Blaise's suggestion to nap, when—

"Dazai," Draco whispered.

Dazai groaned. Slowly, he lifted himself up onto his elbows and peered over the arm of the sofa. Draco was watching him, frowning.

"What, Boss?"

"Er..." He looked to Blaise, then back to Dazai. His quill was poised just over the mostly-blank homework assignment on the desk before him. "When was the Werewolf Code of Conduct signed?"

With a heavy sigh, Dazai dropped back down onto the couch. "...Are you asking me to do your homework? I know I'm your subordinate, but I never agreed to that. I really won't do it. I'll put down all the wrong answers or throw it into the lake, or something."

He was more likely to throw *himself* into the lake if this headache didn't let up soon.

"Oi."

Suddenly, there was a slam. A loud, jarring sound that tore Dazai from his lazy thoughts immediately. Dazai shot up, mouth parted as he looked around for the source of the sound. The magic-induced lethargy lifted from him almost immediately as he searched for a potential threat. His eyes flitted quickly around the room. The window, the door, the desk, the —

Blaise met his eyes from across the room. He inclined his head, and Dazai hurried to follow the motion, only to see Pansy glaring at him. In front of her, the history textbook was shut now—she must have slammed it closed.

Blinking, Dazai let out a breath.

"Don't disrespect Draco, mudblood!"

Dazai rolled his eyes, but before he could offer some charming remark, Draco spoke for him.

"That's enough, Pansy. You know he's going to do that. At this point, I'm not convinced we can beat that disrespect out of him."

She clamped her mouth shut almost immediately, but the simmering hatred remained.

“Oh,” Dazai blinked, caught somewhat off guard. “As a reward for keeping Pansy from biting my head off: the Werewolf Code of Conduct was never signed. They wanted to mandate locking up werewolves on full moons, but no one showed up to sign it.” He glanced to Pansy, offering a sly smile. “If only there was something I could sign that would lock Pansy away for good. She’s mean to me, Boss. Make her do your homework instead!”

Draco put his quill to paper and started writing. He silently nodded along, though Dazai didn’t think the boy really knew what he was agreeing to. He was staring down at his homework with a focused frown.

Pansy’s anger was less quiet. Significantly.

With a tired sigh, Dazai let himself flop back into the sofa. He wasn’t going to be able to sleep now, but lying for a while longer might soothe his aching head. Pressing into the cushion, Dazai’s bangs fell into his eyes.

He lay like that for a while. Every so often, Draco would ask for help on a homework problem. By the tenth question aimed his way, Dazai was fairly sure Draco was just testing him. Dazai didn’t mind. Really—being able to show off was actually a little bit enjoyable, especially considering he was utterly wretched with the more practical aspects of magic.

“Well,” Draco said, neatly slipping his now-finished papers into his bookbag some ten-minutes later, “Looks like you found yourself a new job, subordinate.”

Dazai pushed himself into a sitting position. He hung his head just low enough that the light from the stained glass window missed his eyes. “I didn’t agree to this.” He hummed, “But if it’s for Draco, then I guess it’s fine. As long as you don’t share my homework answers with Pansy, that is.”

Pansy gawped.

“Deal.”

“Hey!”

A small smile tickled the corners of Blaise’s eyes, and Dazai grinned back.

Draco collected his thing from the desk and slipped them into his bag. Pansy and Blaise followed his lead. It was only once everyone else was standing that Dazai forced himself off the sofa and to his feet as well. He arched his back into a long stretch, and only wavered a little with dizziness.

It was getting late, now, but the club room was still flooded with light. Dazai shook his head, then followed the Loyalty Club out of their room once the others began to leave.

Dazai hopped out of the doorway. When he looked over his shoulder, the door had been replaced by the tapestry that usually hung there—The club room really only did appear when they needed it.

Curious, but research for another time. Dazai didn't think he could get away with sneaking out to the library since what had happened last time with Snape. Maybe after all this Quirrell business was done with...

"Are you coming?" Draco called from up ahead.

Dazai blinked. "My bad, Boss."

"*You're* the only one who's going to get lost if he doesn't keep up."

Offering a fake-looking smile, Dazai hurried to catch up. He only slowed down once he was at Blaise's side.

They chatted quietly on the walk down to the dungeons. It wouldn't yet be curfew for an hour, but the corridors were almost completely empty.

Or, most of the halls were empty. When they reached the base of the dungeon stairs, Draco came to a full-stop.

"What's going on?"

Dazai frowned. He strained on the tips of his toes to peer around Draco. Beside him, Blaise was doing the same, although much less enthusiastically.

The dungeons were *full* of other Slytherin students. They were gathered outside the entrance to the common rooms in various stages of disarray. A cluster of students Dazai vaguely recognized were huddled together in their pajamas. Another group of upper-classmen was loudly talking amongst themselves, looking...

Were their clothes *smoldering?*

The smell of smoke hung in the air. Dazai scrunched up his nose.

He blinked at Draco, who was still looking around the dozen-some Slytherins loitering outside their common rooms. "Hey, Boss. Maybe you should ask them what's going on." Dazai said, rocking back on his feet. An idea was tickling the back of his mind but... but it couldn't be *that?*

Could it?

Draco glanced at him, then nodded. He drew that condescending smirk onto his face with a practiced ease, then strode forward into the swarm of students.

Now that they were up closer, Dazai could see a mix of panicked, confused, and excited looks on everyone's faces. A few of the students were holding their stomachs, complaining about feeling sick. He also noticed that many of his fellow snakes had patches of soot or tears on their clothes.

Dazai's eyes narrowed.*The smell of smoke, soot, and animal scratches...*

Behind Draco and Pansy's backs, Dazai and Blaise quickly met each other's eyes.

"Hey, Crabbe, Goyle!"

Dazai snapped back to attention.

Those two hulking, meatheads turned their way. They were both standing right by the door, shuffling around like they were trying to peek inside. The female prefect Dazai remembered from his first day at Hogwarts was glaring at Crabbe and Goyle, but she let out a relieved breath when Draco captured their attention.

"Draco! Been looking for you."

"You're always hanging around those three now..."

Draco hummed, not looking sorry in the slightest for abandoning his other subordinates. Privately, Dazai's lip twitched upward.

"What's going on?" Draco asked, cutting off Crabbe-or-Goyle before they could say any more.

Their mouths dropped open into wide *O's. "* In the common rooms—there's some kind of monster in there. It destroyed the place!"

The other one—Dazai was going to guess Crabbe—shook his head fervently. An angry look blossomed onto his face. "Bet some mudblood scum slipped it in there just to mess with us! You know what their kind is like."

"That's enough," The prefect said, scowling. "It probably just snuck in, like that troll during the Halloween feast."

"It's true!' Goyle hissed. He pointed. "Miss Burke says so!"

Hanging low on the wall behind a pristine frame, the painted lady smirked.

The prefect rolled her eyes.

Draco turned, offering a raised brow to Dazai, Pansy, and Blaise that seemed to say, "Can you believe what I have to put up with?"

Dazai could definitely believe it. After all, *his* subordinates were the trouble-making type as well. Always fussing over useless things. He gave a solemn nod of his head. Then, before Crabbe and Goyle could start bickering too loudly, Dazai cut in, "What kind of monster is it? Did any of you actually see it?"

The underlying question, of course, was: *it's not a baby dragon, is it?*

They stopped talking immediately. Crabbe and Goyle turned matching glares in Dazai's direction, and even the prefect eyed him sharply.

“Why do you want to know, you muggleborn freak?”

“I bet *he* set that beast loose!”

“Answer the question, Goyle,” Draco said. His voice was pompous as ever, but Dazai could hear an undercurrent of a growl there, as well. Something fierce and irritated.

Wordlessly, Dazai rolled back on his heels. Maybe he should let Draco do the interrogating—even if it *was* Dazai’s specialty. With the friendly dynamics in the Loyalty Club, it was easy to forget that the rest of Slytherin barely tolerated him.

Well, it *would* be easy to forget if he wasn’t constantly at the receiving end of those glares.

Goyle looked markedly upset at having to answer the *dirty mudblood’s* question, but Dazai knew the boy would never ignore a demand from Draco. After a second, he was proven correct.

“...I didn’t see it,” Goyle admitted after a stubborn pause, “And Gemma won’t let us back in there to take a look.”

Again, the prefect—Gemma, evidentially—merely rolled her eyes. “You’ll only wind up scratched and burnt like every other idiot here. As a prefect, I can’t let you do that.”

Crabbe and Goyle made some floundering attempt to disprove this, but Dazai stopped listening. He watched how Draco’s nose scrunched up at the mention of burns instead.

“What sort of magical creature can do that, then? Burn someone?” He looked between them, apparently searching for clues. When no one offered any advice after a moment, Draco scowled.

Unbeknownst to Draco, however, Dazai had a pretty good idea of what sort of creature could do that.

He met Blaise’s gaze once again. The message seemed to pass between them silently, but with the force of a thousand desperate thoughts:

Our dragon hatched, didn’t it?

“ Dazai!”

He didn’t flinch, but it was incredibly close. Dazai jolted to attention, grinning sloppily in Draco’s direction. “Hm?”

Draco watched him for a moment, expression skewed up in confusion at the odd reaction. He shook his head. “You’ve been reading up on magical creatures, haven’t you?”

Dazai shrugged. While his eyes were planted firmly on Draco, his mind was somewhere else entirely. Namely trying to figure out what in the *hell* he was going to do if the dragon was loose in the Slytherin common rooms—something that was looking more and more likely by

the second. “Something like that.” He said after a moment. “But you know, an *idiot* like me —”

“Shut up. I get it—you’re secretly some kind of genius. You aren’t going to be hung up on that forever, are you?” Draco said with a huff, “Just tell me what you know. *Idiot.”*

Dazai snorted. “It’s probably just a Fire Dwelling Salamander. I read that their blood is a useful potion ingredient, so I bet Professor Snape lost one and is just too embarrassed to come and get it.”

When Blaise shot him a questioning look, Dazai shrugged and made a face.

“Aren’t those small?” Someone asked. When Dazai looked up to follow the voice, he realized that they were gathering a small crowd of curious Slytherins.

“Yeah! The thing in there is *huge!”*

“ It wasn’t *that* big.”

Dazai looked between them, frowning. As more-and-more students began to collect around them, Dazai began to feel increasingly on edge. This many people never failed to make his skin prickle with discomfort. And with the added stress of being about 90% certain that his dragon was on the loose, Dazai was about one second away from turning-tail.

He briefly caught Draco’s eyes. Curiously, the other boy wore only a contemplative look on his face.

“I think it’s a Fire Salamander,” Draco declared.

Dazai blinked.

Was Draco... *backing him up?*

Draco was always the confident sort. He wasn’t one to question what he had to say, Dazai knew. But once he looked around and realized that he had a captive audience of interested Slytherins? Draco’s pompous personality suddenly increased ten-fold. He had the confident sort of voice that drew eyes to him and demanded respect in return.

“I believe it. A fire salamander.” He nodded. “After that troll snuck in, the professors wouldn’t just let anything break-in. So it has to be one of Professor Snape’s.”

Pulled along by Draco’s charm, the other students, slowly, began to nod in agreement.

Seeing an opportunity to slip out of the crowd, Dazai took a careful step back and stood side-by-side with Blaise. Sure enough, everyone's attention was on Draco now. Dazai let out a breath.

“We need to get in there,” he said, keeping his eyes locked on Draco. He tilted his head back to point his chin at the common rooms.

Blaise hummed, noncommittal.

“Those prefects are blocking the door.” Dazai frowned. His gaze briefly flickered to the common room entrance, then back to Draco. The boy was gesturing widely with his hands, but Dazai wasn’t listening now. “And Draco and Pansy will notice if we sneak away.”

“We’ll have to be quick, then.”

Dazai grinned but dropped the expression only a second later. “This sucks. If I had known it was hatching today I could have prepared better.” Then, under his breath, he grumbled, “I wanted the twins here.”

Blaise passed him another look, considering. “They wouldn’t have been allowed in the Slytherin common rooms, you know.”

“I’m aware. I have a feeling that things are about to get very messy, is all.”

The glance Blaise sent him clearly asked for an explanation. He didn’t get one. Instead, Dazai rocked back on his feet, wearing a thoughtful frown on his face.

With the dragon hatched, everything had changed. They couldn’t just casually pass a baby dragon between the Gryffindor and Slytherin common rooms like they had the egg. No—it had to be somewhere secure. Somewhere no one would find it, but where it couldn’t cause too much trouble. The Forbidden Forest was a bust—the dragon would just fly away and be lost for good. Dazai had even briefly considered the Loyalty Club’s secret training room. Unfortunately, Draco and Pansy were regular visitors there. It would only be a matter of hours before they found the dragon, then. The secret passageways the twins had shown him would be good, but they were too easily accessible by accident and Dazai didn't have the magical know-how to charm them shut by himself. Besides, Dazai could never be sure if any other students were already using those passages.

Still, Dazai was nothing if not resourceful.

Without a word, Dazai suddenly pushed forward towards the common room entrance. It took a second for the prefect to realize she was being approached. Once she spotted him, Gemma’s eyes narrowed and her posture stiffened.

“You can’t come in here. Haven’t you been listening? There’s some kind of monster in there.”

Dazai raised a brow. “A clever Slytherin prefect like you, standing out here instead of facing the threat? How inspiring,” he snorted.

“Hey.” Gemma glared. “A prefect’s job is to take care of their housemates. I don’t see anyone hurt too badly, do you?”

He didn’t take his eyes off of her. After a moment of unrepentant eye-contact, Dazai hummed and took a step back. “I guess you’re right. I’ll leave guarding the doors to you, Miss Prefect.”

Gemma narrowed her eyes. “Behave yourself.”

“Always!”

Dazai turned on his heels and backtracked to Blaise’s side. The other boy was frowning at him.

“Giving up that easily?”

Dazai shrugged. “She makes a good point.”

Blaise glanced to the prefect, then back, wearing suspicion like a cloak. “She does.”

“Yup!” Dazai rocked forward on the balls of his feet. At Blaise’s disbelieving look, he chuckled. “*A prefect’s job is to take care of their housemates.* No one is hurt.”

“Why do I hear a *but* in there?”

“*But*,” Dazai raised a finger in point, “if someone *were* to be hurt, a good prefect would rush to their side and render aid. Thereby leaving the entrance to the common room completely unguarded so we can slip inside.”

Blaise’s expression screwed up for a fraction of a second before dropping back to the neutral one he usually wore. He met Dazai’s eyes head-on. Something in that look seemed to exude exasperation, Dazai thought. “That’s grim.”

Dazai beamed.

“I feel like I should stop you.” Blaise sighed. “What exactly is your plan here?”

“Well—” Dazai started, grinning dangerously. He reached into his cloak. However, when he started to feel around his pockets, the smirk fell completely. He patted his cloak up-and-down. After a moment of fruitless searching, he dug a hand into his bookbag. Nothing.

“What are you looking for?”

“My knife!” Dazai gaped. “I always keep it on me!”

Hastily, Dazai rifled around in his book bag, as if the second search would prove more useful than the first had. He pushed aside his wand case, a textbook, a quill—

Blaise raised a hand, and Dazai stopped looking immediately. He waited to speak until he was sure he had the mafioso’s attention. “First: is your genius plan to stab someone?” He asked, looking more resigned than that question should perhaps have warranted. “Second: I took it.”

Dazai blinked. “You took my knife? When?” He frowned. “Wait. No. *Why?”*

“Because,” Blaise said, “I worry about you.”

Dazai froze—his bandages suddenly weighing him down and burning his skin.

“Also,” Blaise continued, seeming not to realize the shock of cold fear that had just shot through Dazai at his declaration, “you just threatened to stab someone. And I feel like I should remind you that, while I can condone most of your mischief, *stabbing* another student does not generally fall on that list.”

Dazai’s skin still felt too cold. He struggled to shake off the feeling, but settled only on linking his fingers behind his back. “Blaise is mean.” He said after a second.

“So I’ve been told.”

“It’s a really nice knife.” Dazai tried.

Blaise rolled his eyes.

“It is!”

“Boss,” Blaise said seriously. “You aren’t going to stab your housemates.”

Dazai made a face. “Obviously not. You took my knife.”

“Dazai.”

“Right.” He rolled his eyes, then stood back on his heels to look around. Blaise seemed to accept that the conversation had ended easily enough. The other Slytherin rolled his eyes, but held his tongue.

Most of the students were still gathered around Draco. The condescending Slytherin was making some sort of declaration about blood purity now—probably spurred on by what Crabbe and Goyle had been talking about earlier. Dazai immediately tuned him back out with a shake of his head and urned his focus to the other students. Like Gemma had said, none of them were really hurt. A few scrapes here, a few burns there. And—

“Huh.”

Blaise blinked, turning to squint at Dazai. “I’m not giving you your knife back, Boss.” He deadpanned. “Besides, it’s in the common rooms.”

Dazai waved him off. “I wasn’t thinking about that.” He frowned. “But that is good to know.”

He’d dig around Blaise’s things and find it later, after this whole fiasco was taken care of.

Blaise’s brows scrunched together. He tried to follow Dazai’s gaze. “What, then?”

Dazai tilted his head. “Angel is here.”

“Angel?”

“Ron’s pet rat,” Dazai said, eyes narrowed.

Standing on its back legs, the thin, black rat was staring at them. It was standing in the shadows of the dungeons some distance away from the group of Slytherins around Draco. Standing there, silent and staring, Dazai could almost convince himself the rat was a ghost haunting the halls. It blinked two beady, amethyst eyes.

“Hey,” Dazai hummed, “do dragons eat rats? Maybe we can use it as bait.”

Blaise shot him a look, but didn’t make to speak. Dazai let out a breath.

“I guess not.” He squinted down the hall, where Angel was still staring on, steadfast. “I’m going to go say hello.”

The look Blaise sent him this time was more stupefied than exasperated. “To the rat?”

Dazai shrugged. He kicked off from his spot beside Blaise and began to quietly cross the hall. “I’m pretty sure this dumb thing is smarter than it looks." He frowned, envisioning that sharp look in the rat's eyes, "Also, Ron will be jealous that it keeps coming to visit me, and I want to really rub it in his face.”

As he passed behind Draco’s group, Dazai just barely caught Blaise grumbling, “I don’t understand you.” Dazai snorted. Once he was coming up on Angel, Dazai wiped the honest humor from his face and replaced it with a sly smirk.

The sound of Draco and the other Slytherins echoed off the cold, stone walls and bounced around the far end of the corridor where Dazai now stood. He came to a stop in front of Angel. The rat blinked up at him with quick, purple eyes, and Dazai only took a moment to tower over it before kneeling. He still wasn’t quite level with Ron’s pet, but it was closer.

“Good evening, stupid demon rat,” He said, smiling thinly. “You always turn up at the strangest times. Does Ron know you have a penchant for trouble?”

It didn’t respond—merely blinked and stayed perfectly still.

“I guess not. That’s a shame. I really need some trouble right now, too. But I don’t suppose even a horrid rat like you carries a knife with it.” Dazai didn’t look over his shoulder, but he could practically feel Blaise’s eyes watching him converse with the rat. Oddly enough, Dazai didn't feel all that silly talking to Angel. There was something hideously intelligent in its eyes—moreso than Featherbrain could ever manage. Dazai reached out a finger to stroke the fur on Angel’s nose. “Hey, maybe you could bite someone for me instead—”

Angel shot into action, ducking under Dazai’s finger before he could make contact. Its tiny claws scraped against the stone floor as it dashed out of Dazai’s reach. It vanished somewhere in the throng of Slytherin students.

Dazai blinked, then sighed as he rose to his feet. He made his way back to Blaise’s side, where the other boy was giving him a dull look.

“I hate that rat.”

“Then don’t go out of your way to talk to it.”

“Just this one time,” Dazai said, making a face. “Ron wants us to be friends.”

Blaise opened his mouth, then closed it. “It’s a *rat* .”

“It is.” Dazai nodded. “Ron is very committed to the *pets are important* thing.”

He was also spoiling the hell out of Featherbrain, but that was neither-here-nor-there. As long as Dazai’s owl was well enough to deliver letters, Ron could pamper Featherbrain however much he wanted. That the stupid bird also tormented Mori was a plus.

“Hence why I’m letting him keep the dragon.” Dazai continued. “Although now we’ll have to catch it first.”

Blaise opened his mouth like he was about to respond to that, but before he could, a shout cut him off.

“*Ouch!”*

Both Dazai and Blaise jumped at the sudden shout. He heard the conversations buzzing around the hall come to a stop as well, filtered out by interest in the noise. Dazai had to stand on the tips of his toes to see over the crowd. Blaise shot him a look, but didn’t say anything.

“Something just—” Dazai frowned. It had been Draco’s voice that had just called out in pain. “—Something *bit* me!” He shrieked.

‘*Bit,’* Dazai mouthed the word. Then, slowly, a grin crept up on his face.

Someone else in the crowd made a sound like gasping. “The beast!”

“It must have got out!”

“Get Professor Snape!”

Suddenly, everyone was panicked and yelling, but Dazai’s gaze was turned elsewhere. Below the cluster of people, a small, black rat expertly wove between their stomping feet. It shot out from the throng, then vanished into a minuscule crack in the wall.

“Did you do this?” Blaise asked under his breath. When Dazai glanced up at him, the other boy was wearing a look somewhere between resigned and impressed.

Dazai shrugged.

Maybe he had been too hasty in excluding Angel from the gang. For a rat, it took better instructions than some of these other brats did. Dazai didn’t even bother to shake the smirk from his face.

“Nope,” He said. He tilted his head back, and Blaise followed his gaze.

Across the hall, Gemma's mouth was dropped open and her hands were held up in a not-very-effective placating gesture. "It—" she stop-started, "Okay! Everyone stay calm!"

Absolutely no one stayed calm. With Draco's particular brand of melodramatic panic fueling the gathered Slytherins, it would be virtually impossible to keep them all in line now. If only Gemma had been there when Draco had first heard about the mountain troll on Halloween, then she probably would have known that already. She didn't, of course. And Draco's mounting panic ("*I'll call my father a-about this! And he'll sue the whole school! There won't be a magical creature left on* Earth *when he finishes with them!"*) only stirred the others up more.

Gemma seemed to realize this when Draco yelled, "I'm bleeding! Oh, *Merlin,* what if it's fatal!?"

"Calm down!" She yelled, hurrying to Draco's side. "I've been guarding the door, you idiots! The beast didn't *bite* you!"

Gemma hunched over Draco's arm and fussed over whatever she saw there. Dazai didn't let himself feel too guilty about it, if only for the fact that Draco couldn't be *too* hurt if he still had the energy to threaten legal action.

With a wordless nod to Blaise, Dazai snuck across the hall. Blaise followed close on his heel after only a second's hesitation. Dazai pressed himself up against the wall by the common room entrance, feet still and silent on the cobblestone. He waited for a long, mute moment—watching Gemma and the other Slytherins crowd around Draco.

They were distracted. There wouldn't be a better time than this.

He whispered the entry password as loud as he dared, then held his breath. The wall creaked to life beside them.

Dazai didn't wait for the doorway to finish opening. Instead, he snuck in the second it was large enough to fit him without the risk of him accidentally nullifying whatever charm made the magic door work. He felt rather than saw Blaise trail in behind him.

It wasn't until the door was completely shut and a long second had passed that Dazai let out his breath. He glanced to Blaise. "I don't think anyone noticed us." He hummed, forcing a grin onto his face at the nonplussed look on his friend's face. "But we should probably still hurry. How long do you think Draco can pretend to cry for?"

Blaise stared at him, then looked to the room. "I'm pretty certain he wasn't faking anything."

Dazai shrugged his shoulders back. If he could take all the scars on his arm without crying, then Draco *must* have been faking. Not that Dazai was complaining—a distraction was a distraction, no matter how annoying. "Then maybe we have longer to find this thing than I thought." Dazai conceded.

He followed Blaise's gaze to the bedroom.

The room was just as destroyed as Goyle had said. The curtains on the beds were torn and charred. Half of the blankets had been dragged off of their bedding and strewn about the floors, almost as though someone had gotten caught on them while trying to hastily escape. There were books, papers, and quills tossed about the room, too.

Something large and black and scaly was sitting on the stone floor, noisily gnawing on some poor sap's wand. Dazai met its eyes.

Dazai blinked, and before he could open his eyes again, the dragon was gone.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting! yall are the best!!

Black Dragon

Chapter Summary

There's a dragon in the Slytherin rooms.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Something small and snake-like shot out from under a bed and slunk back into the shadows of another. Dazai took a reflexive step back before steeling himself. At his side, Blaise seemed to be doing the same.

“Is that…” Blaise trailed off.

Dazai cautiously walked to Blaise’s bed near the far wall. The curtains were drawn tight around it to prevent anyone from seeing what was meant to be hiding within. Dazai’s own bed was even further from the door, but he didn’t have eyes for that right now. All that was waiting for him on his own bed was a new letter from Mori Dazai had yet to open. With a searching expression plastered across his face, Dazai swung the curtains open.

On a pillow in the center of Blaise’s bed, the jagged, black fragments of a broken egg were cast about.

“The dragon?” Dazai looked up. When Blaise stepped forward to see the shattered remains of their dragon egg, he added, “Yeah, I think so.”

It was one thing to have a (very, *very* strong suspicion), and another to have irrefutable proof staring back at you in the face. Dazai let out a giddy-sounding breath.

Blaise frowned, watching him for a long moment.

There was a feral dragon loose in the Slytherin common rooms. *Dazai’s* feral dragon. Which he had stolen from a suspected mafia member.

This was... *er*—

...he could figure something out.

Dazai opened his mouth to say something more.

Suddenly, a thin, black blur swooped overhead and Dazai’s mouth snapped shut. A flap of dragon’s wings had Dazai’s hair buffeting wildly for a second. His overgrown locks drooped

into his eyes, and by the time Dazai had brushed it behind his ears, the dragon was gone from sight once again.

Blaise met his eyes across the room. He quickly looked away, scanning around the room with a grim expression. Every so often, Dazai would catch a flicker of movement. When he turned to look, nothing was there.

“We should catch it.”

The sound of large claws scrambled against tile. Dazai whipped his head to the side, but only caught the flick of a slim black tail vanishing behind a chest.

He hummed. “Probably.”

But how?

They could barely keep their eyes on the feral little thing, and now they had to capture it? Not only that, but they had to secure it and get it out of the common room and bedroom before anyone saw it. Thinking fast, Dazai mentally flipped through options. He didn’t know enough about dragon behavior to predict its moves accurately but…

Dazai rolled back on his heels, then reached up a hand to scratch at his neck. He turned his gaze onto Blaise.

“Help me corner it.”

Blaise blinked. Then, in perfect deadpan, he said, “You have a plan.”

When Dazai grinned, the corners of Blaise’s lips quirked up slightly.

“Right—it’s you. Of *course* there’s a plan.” He said. “Corner it, huh? Any idea how I’m meant to do that?”

“I’m sure you’ll figure something out. Blaise is a resourceful guy.”

Blaise nodded, seeming to concede the point. He looked around the room with thinned eyes. After a second, Dazai did the same.

He had only a vague idea of what to do in a situation like this. After all, most of Dazai’s research had centered around how to care for a dragon and what types of dragons existed. Absolutely none of his books had included sections on what to do if the egg you stole from a mafioso hatched while you were away, resulting in the baby dragon attacking several of your classmates.

But none of his textbooks had chapters on abilities that could kill magical creatures with a single touch, either. Dazai figured something like him could probably figure this out. Flexing his fingers, Dazai let No Longer Human buzz along the tips. Killing the dragon wasn’t really an option. His interest in messing with Quirrell was too strong to even humor the option. Still…

“Hey,” Blaise interrupted his thought. He was still searching around the room. Every so often, a sound would capture Blaise’s attention. “Be careful, Boss.”

Dazai grinned. “I’m always careful!”

“That’s a joke, right?”

“Ah…” he blinked, looking away quickly, “I guess. You too.”

If Blaise smiled softly at the response, neither of them admitted to it.

BANG!

Dazai and Blaise whipped their heads in the direction of the sound.

A pile of second-year textbooks were collapsed on the floor. They must have been knocked down. Dazai hastily searched for the culprit—

A long, black tail slipped under a bed frame.

“Blaise,” Dazai whispered. He gestured to the left side of the bed.

Blaise blinked, then a look of comprehension dawned onto his face. Slowly and quietly, he crossed the room and stood by the bed where Dazai had motioned.

Nodding, Dazai did the same. He stopped at the right side of the bed beside the pile of books. The pages were seared around the edges. Dazai held his breath—the dragon was below the bed they were guarding. “Think you can grab it?” He asked in a whisper.

Blaise rolled his head on his neck. “I’ve never caught a dragon before.” At his side, Blaise’s hands clenched and unclenched.

“Maybe we can trap it in a bucket.”

There was a sound from under the bed.

“Neither of us is holding something like that, Dazai—"

Dazai barely saw it. A black blur shot out from underneath the bed and twined between Blaise’s knees. Once it was free of them, it burst into the air. Dazai tried to make out the creature’s features, but could only see the shine of its volatile, black claws. It swooped overhead then disappeared once more.

“Well, that didn't work at all.”

Blaise shot him an unamused look, then sighed. “Not that I don’t trust you, but was that your entire plan?”

Something clattered loudly behind him. Dazai whirled around, but the dragon was already gone.

He bit his tongue. “My plan is infinitely complicated.” He said, because saying, *my plan hinges entirely on you because I literally can’t touch the dragon,* opened up too many questions Dazai didn’t really want to answer. At Blaise’s nonplussed look, Dazai smirked. “Don’t worry about it so much.” He glanced at the fallen books, the clawed-up curtains, the burnt blankets. He made a thoughtful noise from the back of his throat. “I don’t think it’s just going to let us grab it. We’ll have to trick it somehow.”

“W—” A pair of beating wings flashed between them for a second. Blaise startled, but by the time he was looking, the dragon had disappeared behind another student’s chest. Blaise took a breath, then finished, “What can trick a dragon?”

Dazai beamed. “I’m glad you asked! I—"

The dragon soared overhead. Dazai sucked in a breath and it ate his words whole.

The beast arched around Dazai like he was poison. It was nothing more than a black blur racing across the gap between he and Blaise. Its claws flashed dangerously in the cold, dungeon lights. When the dragon dove past his ears, Dazai’s hair whipped around in his face again. He sputtered. Dazai couldn’t see past his unruly hair when a *THUMP* caught his attention. He quickly rushed to clear his vision with frantic hands.

“Dazai—!”

His eyes shot toward the call, wide and searching.

Blaise was pinned down against an unmade bed beneath the large, prickly claws of the Norwegian Ridgeback. It had a long, slender body with a large head. Now that it wasn’t flying all over the place, Dazai could more easily see that its black scales were almost brownish in color. The ridges and spikes along its back and face were sharp, deadly daggars. It looked as though the dragon must have flown into someone because the spikes were steeped in blood and torn fabric. Its razor-sharp, black claws were scrambling against Blaise’s chest, tearing up the boy’s cloak. Blaise’s brows were drawn together in pain, but he held on to the dragon steadfast, hands grappling its waist.

“Cornered it f-for you,” Blaise said. His voice was high and stressed and tight with pain in a way that Dazai had never heard before. Not on Blaise, at least. When the dragon twisted in his grip, Blaise’s voice hitched with hurt.

The dragon strained to get free. Its wings beat frantically, smacking the bed with a raucous *thwap thwap thwap!*

A second's hesitation would have been too much, so without thinking, Dazai ran the last few steps to the bed they had fallen onto. “Not exactly what I had in mind!” His voice was pitched up, as well.

Dazai reached out a hand for the dragon, fingers spread. Inches away from touching the dragon—that he was about to kill it barely crossed his mind. Everything in this moment was Blaise’s pained expression and the beating of his own heart.

“Ah!” Blaise let out a pained shout.

But the very second Dazai’s fingers were poised to make contact, the dragon sprung back into action, repulsed by the burn of No Longer Human in the air around Dazai's fingertips. With a violent slash, it forced its way from Blaise’s grip and shot into the air.

Dazai reeled back, expecting a blow that would never come for him.

The shadowy creature slithered underneath a bed. Seconds later, Dazai heard the clatter of its claws on tile on the other side of the room.

He ignored it. Instead, Dazai took a halting step forward until he was hovered over Blaise. He raised a hand to scratch mutely at his wrist as he looked his friend over.

Blaise’s robes were torn and askew. A large cut in his cloak ran through the middle over his chest. It was speckled with blood. Already, there was a purple bruise blooming on his cheek —the dragon’s wing must have beat him there. The observations stung at Dazai’s mind, and the spatter of red on Blaise’s tie only made it worse.

Dazai’s nails caught on the edge of his bandages. He dropped his hands numbly to his side.

“Are you okay?” Dazai whispered, frowning. When Blaise met his eyes, Dazai realized the sentimentality of a question like that. He looked away almost immediately. Instead, Dazai searched for the dragon. He cleared his throat and added in an empty voice, “I mean, do you need to go to the infirmary? Since it's always me going to the infirmary, this is a nice change of pace. I always like a good role reversal.”

For a long moment, the only sound between them was that of Blaise catching his breath. The ech of flapping wings from somewhere nearby seemed to shake him from his thoughts. “It’s not a role reversal, since I can never convince you to actually go to the nurse’s office anyway.” He said, voice quiet. “And I’m fine.”

Willing himself to force eye-contact again, Dazai shot Blaise a disbelieving look.

“Most of them aren’t bleeding. I’ll need new robes, though.”

Dazai scanned Blaise up-and-down, taking the pause to collect his own rough breaths. The boy was certainly in bad shape, but he was right. The wounds were superficial. Dazai had seen worse in the mafia. *He’d seen worse on himself.* But Blaise wasn’t hurt. He was okay. He was…

For some reason, the thought made Dazai want to sigh in relief.

Unwittingly, Dazai’s cheeks flushed over at the realization. He looked to the wall, then offered a hand to Blaise. The other Slytherin blinked. After a moment, Blaise let out an amused-sounding snort. He accepted Dazai’s outstretched hand and hauled himself back to his feet.

“We’re lucky it didn’t blow fire into your face,” Dazai said with false cheer as he dropped Blaise’s hand unceremoniously.

Blaise gave him a dry look.

“You’re right,” Dazai nodded, swiftly masking any emotion in his voice with a sly smirk, “This dragon is too young to breathe fire. It’s probably just spitting sparks.”

“I'm fine, Boss. Are *you* okay?”

Dazai blinked at the non-sequitur, his mouth dropping open unwittingly. Confusion briefly flitted across his face, but he collected himself quickly. “...yes? You know it didn’t jump on *me*, right?” He paused. “Actually... *do* you know that? Blaise, did it bite you? Because Norwegian Ridgebacks have highly venomous fangs and you might be in the early stages of brain death.”

Although it was a little young to be quite that potent. It was more likely to only cause mild sickness until the dragon was a few months older. Still, Dazai took a step forward to squint into Blaise’s eyes. His pupils didn’t look blown...

“I—” Blaise stopped. His brows scrunched together. Dazai tried to decipher the expression, but his eyes wandered to the smear of blood on Blaise’s chest instead. “Okay. First of all, *no.* It did not bite me. Second, I am actually begging you to stop keeping this information to yourself.” He gestured to a shadowy part of the common rooms. A second later, Dazai heard the dragon scuttling around there. “It’s poisonous?”

“Venomous.” Dazai corrected numbly.

Blaise hummed and he raised a hand to poke at one of the wounds on his chest. His breathing was still all wrong—not the calm and uncaring Blaise Dazai was so used to.

Dazai bit his lip.

“Okay,” Blaise said after a pause. Then, like he was trying to calm his post-dragon-attack nerves, he said in a mostly-even voice, “You had a plan?”

Blinking, Dazai nodded. He stepped away from Blaise, giving the boy space to breathe. Looking around, the dragon wasn’t in sight... under the beds again, maybe?

“We’re going to lure it out of the common rooms.” He said, “After that...”

Blaise raised a brow.

“Well,” Dazai hummed, eyes catching on a flicker of movement near his bed, “I don’t want to ruin the surprise.”

Blaise’s lip twitched. “What did I just say about keeping things to yourself.”

“That’s true. But you know I have to be dramatic, Blaise! It’s just who I am.”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Blaise let out a low noise. Then he turned his gaze back to the room, eyes searching. A scamper of claws caught his attention. When Dazai looked as well, he narrowly caught a tail vanishing behind some torn curtains.

“What’s the plan, then, Boss?” Blaise said after a moment, sounding both resigned and bored at once. It was, altogether, a very Blaise voice to have. Compared to how breathy his friend had sounded seconds earlier, Dazai felt a strange wave of relief wash over him at the normality.

Dazai was distantly aware of the sound of stones scraping. That dragon sure moved fast.

He drew a wide smirk onto his face. Now that they were back on track—

“Why am I not surprised that *you* of all students snuck in here, Mr. Dazai?”

Dazai jumped, flinching a step back as he whirled around to come face-to-face with a glaring Professor Snape.

Shit!

“Calm down,” Snape said, expression flickering briefly between considering and annoyed. He shook it off and scowled. As the potions professor made his way across the bedrooms, he only briefly looked around the destroyed room. Mostly, his gaze was locked on Dazai and Blaise.

Dazai tried to pull an amused look on his face with limited success. He was still feeling rattled from Snape’s sudden entrance. Blaise wasn’t looking any better off—though the boy had a more reasonable excuse.

Professor Snape’s eyes flicked to Blaise’s chest. “Are you hurt?”

At his side, Blaise stood up straighter. “Not badly.”

Snape nodded. “Good.” Suddenly, his glare returned full-force. He looked between the two of them. “I’m positive that Ms. Farley told you two not to enter the dorm rooms, seeing as she was in a full panic at having *lost* you,” Snape growled. “So why do I find you in here,” he eyed Blaise’s wounds, “evidentially fighting off whatever creature has snuck in?”

“There’s a very reasonable explanation to all this,” Dazai said, leveling his voice.

Professor Snape raised a brow.

“I haven’t thought of it yet, but when I do, I’ll let you know.”

“What you will *do,* Mr. Dazai,” Snape all but hissed, stepping further across the room until he was practically chest-to-chest with them, “is take Mr. Zabini and *leave* the Slytherin common room as you were previously instructed.”

Blaise and Dazai shared a look. An unspoken question rang between them: *is it time to give up?*

When Dazai shook his head minutely, Blaise shrugged. He turned to Professor Snape. “We thought it would be safe to come in here since the creature escaped.”

Snape's eyes narrowed. "Escaped."

"Right! It bit Draco in the hall. Did you not see him?"

Seeming to think it over, Professor Snape took a step back. "Ms. Farely did mention she had sent someone to the infirmary." He scowled. "Regardless, it is not either of you who should be making these decisions. I will search the Slytherin rooms myself. Wait in the library until I have cleared them."

Dazai pouted but beside him, Blaise's characteristic blank expression was still standing. They shared a look. When Dazai's fingers twitched for the knife he wouldn't find, Blaise sighed.

"Thank you, Professor. Our bad."

Snape nodded, eyes narrowed and serious. He watched as Blaise rested a hand on Dazai's shoulder and slowly turned the mafioso around. Dazai, frowning, let himself be pushed along

It wasn't until he was certain that Professor Snape had turned his focus to the hidden beast that Dazai whispered, "Blaise, what are you doing? We can't just leave!"

"We're leaving this to Professor Snape," Blaise said. He let out a weary breath. "You didn't look like you had a plan."

"I feel like we addressed this already. I *always* have a plan."

"And that plan was—what, exactly?"

They came to a stop just before the exit to the Slytherin rooms. Dazai turned to Blaise instead of making to open the door. Blaise made a questioning noise in the back of his throat.

"I would have distracted him," Dazai whispered as harshly as he thought he could get away with, "if *someone* didn't steal my knife!"

Blaise's nose scrunched up minutely. "If you need a knife to distract someone, then that's probably for the best."

Frowning, Dazai glanced around the room, keeping his wandering eyes shadowed beneath bangs. He caught a flicker of movement near the door. Dazai huffed. "Blaise is the worst. And I'll think of something."

"Fine," Blaise said. "But if we're going to stay here and try to catch this thing..." He held out his hand, holding something small and red between two fingers. "Take this."

Dazai blinked down at the object, a crease pinching between his brows. "A hair tie?"

"I stole it from one of the beds," Blaise said. He dropped a thin, red band into Dazai's open palm. "Every time the d—the *beast* flies by, your hair gets in your face, right? Tie it up."

Dazai hummed, thoughtfully. He toyed with the band between his fingers for a second before reaching up to pull his hair back.

“ *No*.” Professor Snape suddenly ground out from across the room. His oily voice cut into their conversation with scathing ease. “There will be no need for you to tie your hair up, seeing as you two will be leaving right this moment before I have you both *expelled* .” There was an undercurrent of fury there, too, but Dazai couldn’t quite place *why*. It was the sort of anger Snape reserved for pesky Gryffindors. Therefore, it *wasn’t* the type of anger Snape threw in Dazai’s face.

No... the type of anger Dazai got was smothered somewhere beneath warm tea and honey.

“Aw, you wouldn’t expel me, Sir,” Dazai said, looping the hair tie around once, then twice. When he dropped his hands back to his sides and looked up to see Snape’s face, his overgrown locks stayed pulled back. Dazai grinned. “Maybe you should have a cup of tea and calm down.”

Snape’s brow twitched. Beside him, Blaise took a cautious step back.

“That. Is. *Enough.”* Snape hissed, face going red, “Now, get—!”

A black blur shot past them.

Professor Snape stumbled back a step, eyes dashing to the side in hopes of catching sight of the beast. Blaise and Dazai, who were by now much more familiar with the dragon’s antics, merely blinked at the display.

“That was not a salamander,” Snape mumbled under his breath. He searched for a long, quiet moment. Everything in the room suddenly fell victim to one of Snape’s infamous glares. The fallen books, the ragged curtains, the chests... nothing escaped the potion master’s suspicion.

Dazai shared a look with Blaise, but didn’t think they would be able to make some grand escape. Not with how watchful Snape had become.

Just as the thought was crossing his mind, Professor Snape whirled back to his students. “What kind of beast is it?”

Pouting innocently, Dazai shrugged. “How should we know, Sir?”

“I thought it was a fire salamander,” Blaise said, deadpan. “Can those not fly?”

Snape’s whole face contorted with what must have been rage. “No.” He practically spat. “They cannot.”

“Drat,” Dazai said. He snapped his fingers. “Back to square one, then—”

Before he could even finish speaking, the dragon was dashing between them once again. Each brush by forced a gust of wind through the room. This time, Dazai’s hair stayed stubbornly in place.

“That's enough—get out!” Professor Snape suddenly shouted in their direction. However, his eyes were instead shooting around the air wildly, aiming fruitlessly to keep track of the dragon. It never stayed in one spot long enough for them to get a good look. Hopefully, it would keep that up. Dazai didn’t know what he would do once Snape figured out exactly what sort of creature it was—and subsequently how it had gotten here.

Snape was half-way through another yell for Blaise and Dazai to leave when his words suddenly cut off with a pained cry. The dragon swooped down and crashed into the potion professor’s faces, claws scrabbling at the man’s long, greasy hair.

Professor Snape grabbled for his wand, curses spilling from his lips like blood.

The situation screamed: *Get help!*

Dazai’s mind said: *Distraction!*

Blanking the thrum of his heart from his mind, Dazai spun on Blaise. “Incendio!” He whispered.

“What?” Blaise said back. His eyes were locked onto Professor Snape’s struggling figure. He lurched forward every few seconds as if unsure if he would be able to help or not.

“Incendio!” Dazai repeated. He was already tugging out his wand. “The dragon will be drawn to the fire. We can lure it off Professor Snape and into the hall while he’s recovering!”

Blaise’s mouth dropped open. “The *hall—”*

“ Just trust me!”

For a split-second, all Blaise did was stare. Then, all the worry in his face was masked behind a serious certainty. He nodded, resolute. “Always.”

Always. What a strange thing to say.

But Dazai didn’t have time to dwell on it. Instead, he was already waving his wand in a wide arch and whispering, “*Incendio!”*

Beside him, Dazai heard Blaise do the same. At the swish of the other boy’s wand, the books that had fallen to the floor earlier abruptly caught ablaze.

Dazai’s spell sputtered and died.

“Oops.”

Scratching a Snape’s face, the dragon suddenly perked to attention. Its slim, spiked face shot up in the direction of the flames.

“*Dazai,”* Blaise hissed under his breath, “can you cast this?”

A wave of nausea rolled through Dazai's body. When he followed Blaise to the fire, his steps stumbled. "It just takes a few tries." His face scrunched up in concentration. "*Incendio!"*

Another flick of his wand, another sharp pain racking through his body.

A small line of smoke trailed up from a pile of curtains.

On the bed, the dragon suddenly came to life. It tore off of Snape's face, leaving long, red marks behind. The dragon flew to Blaise's book fire.

Professor Snape groaned. He was still disoriented, but it wouldn't be long before he was up. They would have to be fast—

"Dazai!" Blaise whisper-shouted.

"I know!"

Dazai closed his eyes and concentrated. He took in a deep breath and held it for a long moment.

A *snap.* Incendio had always been a *snap* of magic. Dazai raised his wand and thought hard about that unusual sensation. *Just draw the magic together,* he thought, *and snap.* But...

No. Lighting another stack of books on fire wouldn't get them anywhere. They couldn't just light a path of flames all the way out of the common rooms and through the halls. Anyone could follow them. Snape *would* follow them. What Dazai needed was a flame that stayed put. Which was objectively *not* what the incendio spell was for. But... Dazai could intimately feel the magic in the air. How it moved and swayed. He just had to give it more specific instructions than incendio would usually require. Right?

Dazai let out his breath. "*Incendio!"*

That something in the air *snapped,* and something in Dazai did, too. A lightning-sharp headache pierced through him, but Dazai didn't stumble this time. He held on tight to the magic and didn't let go.

Finally, Dazai pried his eyes open. For a second, his vision only swam.

At the tip of his outstretched wand, a tiny flame flickered and danced.

Dazai blinked. He bit his tongue through a wave of sickness, as he was forced to keep channeling effort into keeping the spell lit. Without a target, Dazai's focus had become its only kindling.

Someone gasped. A split-second of dread filled Dazai up, and the lapse in concentration caused his fire to briefly die out. He forced it back to life.

"How are you doing that?" Blaise asked, voice hushed.

“Hm?” Dazai glanced up briefly to meet Blaise’s eyes. However, he quickly turned back to the flame when he realized it would be too difficult to maintain without a visual. Dazai opened his mouth to reply, but struggled to articulate properly. “Focus,” He finally said. It felt like a railroad spike had wedged itself behind his eyes.

“I—okay,” Blaise said. “Thanks. Let’s hurry.”

Dazai nodded stiffly. Everything was spinning now. It had been a while since he’d really passed out from magic use, but if he kept this up for much longer... He glared at the flame when it wavered. Even talking seemed like too much. But Blaise was a smart guy. Dazai hoped he would be able to figure out what Dazai needed him to do without instructions.

There was a groaning and shuffling sound from the bed, and Dazai knew they had to hurry. Snape would be up soon.

Dazai heard Blaise’s footsteps cross the room, but didn’t look up from his flame. The quick steps charged straight towards the dragon. Not a second later, a flap of wings indicated the dragon had left its perch on the burning books.

Great, Dazai thought, *now to get it to my flame without passing out.*

It was harder than it sounded, and just the thought itself had Dazai’s vision wavering. He steeled himself.

Across the room, Blaise used the dragon’s flightiness to his advantage. He effectively herded the dragon by running at it. A flap of wings, the *whoosh* of air overhead... Dazai steadied the grip on his wand. He heard the air change directions.

Dazai was aware the very instant that the dragon noticed his flame. It would be near impossible *not* to notice, really.

Four bloody, black claws latched around Dazai’s wand. The dragon perched on the blackthorn stick, eyes beady and empty as they stared into the flickering flame. It was perfectly still—any movement would risk touching Dazai—and therefore touching No Longer Human. The dragon must have known doing so was a death sentence. But the allure of a burning flame was too strong to resist. The dragon stayed put on Dazai's wand, drawn to the fire all baby dragons craved.

At the sudden weight, Dazai nearly dropped his hold on the incendio. But a “you've got it,” whispered from Blaise reinforced his focus.

Abruptly, an arm wrapped around Dazai’s elbow. Blaise quickly guided him across the room and to the entrance. “Just keep focusing,” he whispered, “I’ll take you...”

“Thanks.”

“...where am I taking you?”

Dazai’s legs felt weak underneath him. Blaise quickly worked to hold the mafioso up by wrapping his other arm around Dazai’s waist. He couldn’t even find it in himself to panic

about the close-contact. Dazai was too busy trying to not lose the flame for trivial anxieties like that.

“Just the hall,” He said, short of breath. His thoughts felt foggy, suddenly, and the exhaustion Dazai had come to associate with using magic weighed on him tenfold. “I’ll tell you from there. It’s... it’s really easier with a... uh... a visual.”

Blaise’s grip tightened on his elbow. “Are you okay?”

“Fantastic.”

Blaise made a low sound in his throat that Dazai didn’t have the energy to decipher. Then, opening the entrance door, he called out, “You were right, Professor. This is too dangerous for us. We’ll be leaving, then.”

The bed creaked, and Professor Snape made a long, hurt noise.

“Bye, Sir!” Dazai added, shaky. He stumbled through the door, “Er—”

“I’ve got you,” Blaise whispered. Dazai didn’t nod, merely let himself be pulled along numbly.

When the door shut behind them, Dazai let himself relax minutely. Professor Snape hadn’t seen the dragon. At least, he didn’t *realize* that what he saw had been a dragon. Dazai took the briefest of moments to feel guilty about the man getting hurt, but didn’t hold on to the emotion long. It left a sick feeling in his chest, and Dazai had bigger things to get sick over. Like the strain of magic and the overuse of No Longer Human. He quickly tensed back up, determined to keep the flame stable until they could stash the dragon somewhere. As Blaise guided him, the dragon stayed firmly stuck to Dazai's wand.

The halls were silent now. As Snape had said, the Slytherins must have been evacuated to the library just like with the troll incident on Halloween. If Dazai was right, the entire dungeons should be abandoned—probably blocked off by the other professors.

The fact that Blaise wasn’t quickly spewing an excuse to anyone proved that theory nicely. The arms wrapped around Dazai tightened their hold. Whether the response was from stress or the fact that Dazai was slowly sinking to the floor was anyone’s guess. If Mori ever asked, it was definitely the former.

“Where are we going?” Blaise asked. Dazai had to blink around the growing fog in his senses before he could properly make out the sentence. For some reason, Blaise sounded panicked.

Dazai’s eyes were still locked onto his flame, and the dragon didn’t show any indication of flying away. So what was there to worry over? They were almost in the clear now!

“*Dazai."* Blaise shook him slightly.

Oh. Right. How long had he paused before responding? It hadn’t *felt* like that long, but Blaise’s voice was stressed and breathless now. Dazai drew in a cold, numb breath.

“Where do you want us to go?” Blaise reiterated.

Dazai blinked through the magic-induced fog in his head.

Right. *Right.* He needed to push through all this stone nonsense, *then* he could take a long nap. Or—possibly—just die. Dazai was still kind of up-in-the-air about that one.

But firstly...

The dungeon corridor was empty of students, luckily, but they wouldn’t have much luck after that. It was pretty late, but Dazai was willing to bet there were at least a few professors wandering around out there. They needed to skip that risk. The only way Dazai knew how was...

“There’s a secret passage over,” he tipped his head, but winced when the motion made his skull pound and vision swim, “o-over there.”

Blaise watched him for a moment, concerned. Finally, he turned to look in the direction Dazai had vaguely suggested. He slowly guided Dazai to that area. Every so often, Dazai would mumble more specific directions under his breath.

“The stone looks a bit different,” He said, taking in a numb breath, “more smooth. Maybe.”

"*Maybe?"*

"You know that magic makes me sick," Dazai said, voice tight. What he was feeling right now was *way* more than just sick. His vision blurred over for a second and his knees begged to give out. "I'm doing my best."

Hearing this, Blaise made a small sound of acknowledgment. With a whispered apology, he readjusted his hold on Dazai, removing the hand on his elbow to feel along the wall instead.

In all honesty, this wasn’t a secret passage Dazai really used. The twins had shown it to him earlier in the school year, along with all the other secrets they cared to share. But the door was too close to the Slytherin common rooms. More than that, it was *very* close to Snape’s office. Absolutely no part of Dazai wanted to reveal his knowledge of secret passages. Not using this one was just the easiest solution. And...

I like having the option to hide where no one can find me, he thought bitterly. He *certainly* didn’t mention anything about when the twins had calmed him down in one of their passages. Didn’t say how reassuring or safe or utterly perplexed the whole thing had made him.

Dazai rolled his tongue in his mouth. It was cold and leaden. The extended magic use drained him and fogged up his brain. Dazai struggled to find coherence in his thoughts.

“Found it,” Blaise said. Dazai silently appreciated the distraction from his muddled brain. “I think.”

Dazai hummed. Though he didn’t look up from the flame, he replied, “This seems right. Tap it with your wand three times.”

There was a shuffle of fabric and Dazai felt Blaise's grip on him adjust while the boy searched for his wand. Dazai heard the *tap, tap, tap* before he felt the shift of magic in the air. The stone wall opened up, bricks pulling back to reveal a long, dark corridor. The magic powering the door bit at the air, and Dazai's already overtaxed No Longer Human stung.

His flame flickered.

Dazai bit his lip and pumped more energy into the spell. It reignited shakily, and Dazai felt himself wavering with it.

"Come on," Blaise whispered softly, returning his wand to his cloak. Without another word, he grabbed Dazai's elbow again and guided him into the secret passage.

Almost immediately after they were inside, the passage door slid shut behind them with a *thump.* Dazai had to hold his breath to keep the flame burning when it did—the other magic signature making it difficult to focus on his own spell.

"Dazai."

Dazai hummed.

"Hey," Blaise said. He sounded concerned. It was a weird thing to hear on a person like Blaise. But, Dazai supposed, not that unusual. "Can the dragon sneak out of here?"

"Er..." Dazai blanked.

It was quiet for a moment. Dazai wasn't sure if Blaise just wasn't talking or if his ears had been filled in with cotton. Everything was blurring and the world spun, but the dragon stayed perfectly still. Darkness prickled at the corners of Dazai's vision.

This was... bad. Keeping up this spell wasn't even *close* to the same thing as practicing *incendio* a few dozen times in the club room. It was constantly starting and stopping the spell. Repeatedly overworking his already low capacity for spell casting. Keeping the flame from spreading by smothering it out every quarter-of-a-second, then lighting it over again. Over and over and over—

"Do I need to do the wand tapping thing to open the entrance back up?"

Dazai blinked slowly. It was a long enough lapse in focus that the dragon twitched and the flame briefly died out. When Dazai quickly reignited his spell, a tight pain bit at his chest.

But... right. Blaise had asked a question. He liked Blaise—the least Dazai could do would be to answer his questions. "Yes," He said. "The dragon shouldn't be able to open it. Just—" his body was somewhere else—completely detached. Unconsciousness burned at the dark edges of Dazai's eyesight. "Er... yes."

Something wet and hot rolled down Dazai's face.

"Good," Blaise said, serious. "Then stop the spell. You're hurting yourself."

Dazai frowned.

“Dazai,” Blaise sounded almost panicked now. What was going on? Dazai almost felt a trill of worry himself, but couldn’t muster up the energy. “Dazai. The dragon can’t get out, so you can drop the spell. No one will find us.”

The flame flickered and swayed. The dragon did too. Dazai forced it to stabilize and his vision briefly went black.

Something warm gushed down his face, over his lips, and down his chin. He heard a faint splatter of liquid on tile.

“*Dazai.”*

He had to stay focused, otherwise everything would be over. Dazai would be found out, shipped home, stuck in that fancy cage Father called a bedroom. Stuck forever and ever and *ever* and—. He needed to get the Philosopher’s Stone first.

Suddenly, a hand was yanking the wand from his own. Dazai was too weak to hold on and it shot out of his grip and skidded across the floor. He was faintly aware of the dragon flying off after the now-unlit stick. Dazai’s hands fell limp at his side.

He wasn’t aware that he had slid to the floor until Blaise kneeled down in front of him.

Blaise was moving his mouth. It took a few seconds for Dazai to parse out the words, though. “I’m taking you to the infirmary.”

Dazai shook his head, but stopped when that only made everything worse. He felt cold and seconds away from passing out, but he didn’t have time for Madam Pomfrey tonight. “We aren’t done yet,” He said after a moment, voice thick and far-away. When he spoke, something dripped into his mouth. Dazai recognized the taste of blood immediately.

Blaise must have read the confusion on his face, because he quickly said, “Your nose is bleeding. Just like after the troll.”

“Oh.” He hadn’t realized. That explained a lot, though. Meekly, Dazai glanced to the floor, where a sizable collection of blood drops had formed. That much blood... half his face must have been painted over in red by now. “Still.”

There was another moment of silence. Dazai thought he heard the scampering of dragon claws down the hall, but couldn’t be sure.

“You said *we aren’t done.”* Blaise’s voice was gentle. He met Dazai’s eyes. “But I’m unclear as to what you expect to do in this condition.”

Dazai gaped. For a long second, Dazai wasn’t sure he even had the energy to close his mouth again. Instead, he settled for replying. “We need to get the stone. Tonight.”

“*Tonight?!”*

“ It makes the most sense,” Dazai hummed. He had to take a moment to collect himself when a wave of nausea boiled in his stomach.

Blaise watched him, concern palpable in his expression. His hands hovered just above Dazai’s waist, as if trying to figure out how to help. Or maybe trying to decide the best way to pick Dazai up and carry him to the infirmary. With the state the mafioso was in now, Dazai didn’t think he’d put up much of a fight.

Dazai continued, hoping to turn Blaise off the idea. “Once Quirrell hears about what happened in there, he’ll know about the dragon hatching. And we don’t have anywhere to keep the dragon, really. He’ll know that we can’t keep it a secret anymore, which means we’ll have to tell the other professors about it being his egg.” He paused, taking a deep breath. “It’s not long before he goes for the stone after this. Probably. And...” Dazai trailed off. Suddenly, thinking about Quirrell was exhausting.

A high pitch rattled around in Dazai’s skull. He closed his eyes and pinched them shut.

“And I need it first,” He finished weakly.

Blaise was silent for long enough that Dazai squinted his eyes open to look. The boy was staring at him, looking equal parts contemplative and worried. There was a pinch to his brows, but when Blaise finally spoke, his voice was measured. “We *will* get it before Professor Quirrell. But you look dead on your feet, Dazai. You aren’t going to be able to take down Hagrid’s beast or the other professor’s guards if you’re on the brink of passing out.”

When Dazai didn’t respond, he continued, “Look. I’ll go to the infirmary, too.” He gestured to his various cuts and scratches. “But you need to take better care of yourself. This is really concerning—and you know I usually can’t be bothered to worry about things.”

That didn’t seem quite right, but Dazai needed to keep them on track.

“The dragon—”

“—will stay in here. We can ask the twins to charm the hall so no one else can enter, or something,” Blaise said, resting a hand on one of Dazai’s. The mafioso supposed it was meant to be reassuring.

Dazai held his breath. A thousand distractions and manipulations hid under his tongue. Dazai kept them to himself. Maybe it was the exhaustion holding him silent, or maybe it was just Blaise. He opened his mouth, then closed it again. Even that simple movement tasted of blood and made everything a distant smudge.

“Blaise is the worst,” He said, finally.

All at once, the tension melted from Blaise’s body. He took his hand back, then slowly rose to his feet. “Yup. Now come on.” He held out a hand. Dazai stared at it, blinking, before realizing he was supposed to take it. “Can you stand?”

“Uh.”

To be honest, Dazai could barely feel his body.

“Yes?”

“Okay,” Blaise said. “So that’s a *no.”*

“The worst.”

Blaise looked down at him fondly. He bent down to wrap his arms around Dazai’s side again, then slowly levered the mafioso into a standing position.

The sudden change in altitude made Dazai keen forward, on the verge of sickness. But Blaise held him upright until the worst of it had passed. “You good, Boss?”

“Great.”

“Okay. Can you stay here for a second?”

Dazai blinked sluggishly. Almost his entire weight was on Blaise now, but he was able to shift so that the wall was holding him up. “Sure. Why?”

Blaise hummed. Suddenly, the arms holding Dazai up dropped away. It took all of Dazai’s energy to stay standing. Distantly, Dazai felt a spell being cast. He looked up blearily and saw a flicker of flame dancing down the hall. Just like with the door, the sudden influx of magical energy *hurt.* Before he could collapse again, however, Blaise was back at his side. Dazai melted into him mostly by accident. His breaths were coming out cold and shaky.

“Got your wand,” Blaise answered. “Let's get out of here before the dragon notices we’re opening the door.”

Dazai hummed. He let Blaise carry him out of the door, wincing terribly as the charm activated. The door closed behind them, but the black dragon stayed put. It didn’t even blink away from the small incendio flame Blaise created before they left.

The corridor was still empty, and Snape was gone. Probably still searching for his *fire salamander* in the common rooms. It was late now. The torches were still alight, but Dazai was sure it would only be minutes before curfew.

Dazai could barely move. Magic always took its toll on him, but improvising a more taxing version of incendio was like pouring boiling water into his skull. *Too much.* And it *hurt.* He wanted nothing more than to sleep forever. To pass out right here in the hall and let someone else deal with his headache. Every step was a numb agony. He felt far away.

Blaise’s hand squeezed his shoulder. “Can you make it up the stairs?”

Dazai sucked in a sharp breath. “Yeah,” he said. “I’m feeling a lot better already.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry its a bit late in the day!
thanks for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos! i love hearing what yall think! :)

see ya next week!

Loyal Dogs

Chapter Summary

A magically-exhausted Dazai naps in the infirmary.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Hold still, Dear. If you keep moving I won't be able to apply the bandage properly."

Draco let out an outraged squawk. "I don't want a bandage! Just use the healing spell like you did for Blaise!"

Madam Pomfrey sighed. She placed her hand gently on Draco's shoulder. "My dear boy, there is practically nothing to heal. I'm honestly not even sure this warrants a bandage."

"I was bit!"

It was quiet for a long moment. Then, the sound of adhesive tearing off of a bandage filled the infirmary room. Madam Pomfrey lightly tapped the bandage into place, smiling sedately.

Dazai made an amused sound.

In response, Draco almost immediately returned to his obnoxious, self-centered ramblings. Things like "*don't brush this off like its nothing"* and "*bit by a monster, aren't you listening?!"* All of it only made Dazai's headache worse. He really *wasn't* listening. It was impossible, what with the static roar of blood pounding around in his skull and the thick swath of exhaustion plugging his ears. Magic had made Dazai ill before, but *this* was something else entirely. He groaned and pushed closer into the cot.

Dazai's cot was just to the left of Draco's, but the two were in drastically different conditions. Where Draco was upright and fussing about a bandage, Dazai was practically curled up underneath a blanket. He had the cloth pulled up over his eyes to block out the harsh lights in the infirmary with limited success.

It would have been a challenge to stay awake after using that much magic for so long, but Dazai had the constant, agonizing pain to keep him afloat. The headache, the nausea, the feeling like his blood was trying to get away from him...

Well. At least his nose had stopped bleeding.

After Blaise had half-dragged Dazai into the infirmary, Madam Pomfrey had quickly rushed to their aid. She must have known that Dazai's condition was worse than the bloody scratches

Blaise wore, because she hurried to lay Dazai down and begin a battery of tests. Next thing Dazai knew, he was making himself as small as possible beneath a thin bedsheet and blindly following the command, "rest up now, dear."

Honestly, he could barely remember walking over here now. Everything was a blurry haze—a mix of memories made by something in the thick of magical exhaustion. Dazai was *certain* that there was something he ought to be worrying about but... he just couldn't place it. Couldn't focus on it. Everything *hurt.* Dazai squeezed his eyes until colors started to dance on the lids. That didn't make his thoughts clear up at all, but the stabbing pain anchored him to the bed. It was a really comfortable bed—though maybe *every* bed would be this comfortable to someone as exhausted and pained as Dazai currently was.

"Mr. Malfoy—keep your voice down." Madam Pomfrey said, voice stern, "And Mr. Dazai—you should be resting."

"I *am* resting," He grumbled tightly, "Ma'am."

"Resting students don't talk.*"*

Dazai bit his tongue and let the argument in his throat die away. He was feeling too sick for that right now. Or maybe he just didn't like the idea of snapping back at a doctor. Either way, Dazai was too disoriented to tell. Pomfrey had a point, anyway. Trying to articulate his thoughts into reality just made everything hurt a little worse.

Remind me to never use incendio again, Dazai thought. He tried to aim that sentiment at Blaise, but they had never been able to figure out telepathy like the twins had. Dazai kicked his knees up to his chin instead.

"I'm sorry," Draco said sharply, "why are you even in here, Dazai? I get Blaise being attacked by the beast. But you just... what? Got sick?"

Dazai opened his mouth to respond, then let it fall shut. He shuffled weakly under the blankets.

"He was trying out a new magic trick with incendio," Blaise supplied listlessly. Dazai considered sitting up to meet the other boy's eyes, but thought better of it when a wave of dizziness crashed through him. "And promptly overworked himself."

"Oh. Well then. That does make sense."

Madam Pomfrey made a *tutting* noise overhead. There was something considering in her voice when she spoke. "Honestly, dear. You have quite possibly the lowest threshold for magic I've ever seen. You need to be more careful with your limits. I'm surprised you're even conscious right now, with how far you pushed yourself tonight."

The infirmary was quiet for a moment. Dazai wasn't really sure why—the information was nothing new. He let out an exhausted breath. After a moment, Draco did the same.

"Still," the boy huffed, "you kind of brought this on yourself."

“Wow. Thanks.”

“I mean, it wasn’t *valiantly* fighting off a beast like I did. But practicing a basic spell until you pass out *is* very in character for you.”

Dazai let his eyelids fall shut rather than sniping back. Hidden beneath the blanket, there wasn’t much point in pasting a cheeky grin onto his face. As it was, his mind was really too muddled for their usual banter. Instead, Dazai allowed the fuzzy, black sting of No Longer Human wash over his mind.

It was peaceful. Numb. The beginnings of sleep tickled at the edge of Dazai’s awareness.

“I’ll be right back, boys,” Pomfrey said. It felt like he was only hearing the echo of her words now. “I need to pick a few things up. Under *no* circumstances should any of you be leaving this room until I return. Am I clear?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Yes.”

Dazai parted his mouth to speak but instead of saying anything coherent, a pained groan slipped out.

The nurse sighed. “I’ll be right back, dears. You better be resting when I return, Mr. Dazai.”

“Ngh.”

“Good.”

The sound of heels on tile was far away in Dazai’s ears. He was only aware that Pomfrey had left when the room went markedly quiet. The sound of the door opening and shutting had completely slipped his focus. He was *really* out of it—Mori would be ashamed. A real mafioso should always be focused and attentive. Should always be ready to kill everyone else in the room.

That thought didn’t taste right on his tongue. Dazai pressed his face into the cot and forced his body to relax. Only seconds later and sleep was seeming more-and-more like a reality.

He wasn’t sure how much time had passed, floating in that tired haze of ability- and magic-overuse. Around him, Dazai caught snippets of conversation. They floated in-and-out of his awareness. Things he would have to piece together once the world wasn’t pressing into him painfully.

“So, *was* it a salamander?” Draco asked at one point. “You clearly fought it.”

“I didn’t fight anything.”

Dazai blinked, and they were having an entirely different conversation. He blinked again, and the room was silent. Blinked again—

“I’m pretty sure Dazai just made it up.”

Dazai was jolted from a half-formed dream about suicide when he heard his name being spoken. He willed himself to focus. Pinching the back of his hand to stay awake, Dazai strained to hear Blaise speak over the force of his exhaustion.

“You can’t *make up* a spell, Blaise,” Draco shot back. He sounded annoyed. “Especially if you’re Dazai.”

Blaise’s voice was uncharacteristically fierce, Dazai thought distantly. Maybe he was imagining it. “Incendio is a stream of fire that lights other items ablaze, not a stationary flame over the wand. I’ve never heard of anything like that before.”

“Still.”

“*Still?* People don’t just *invent* spells, Draco.”

It was silent for a long moment—long enough that Dazai thought he might have drifted back to that dark, sleepy place.

Finally, Draco said, “What do you want me to do, Blaise? I’m trying to teach Dazai magic during our club meetings as best I can without knocking him unconscious. We already *know* he’s powerful,” Draco growled, something odd in his voice. Dazai couldn't place it in his exhausted, numb state. “He saved me from the troll, remember?”

“He needs to practice with a real professor,” Blaise replied, voice level in a practiced sort of way. “One that doesn’t encourage pushing himself way past his limits. This isn’t safe—you didn't see him back there, Draco. It... He looked *bad.*”

“He has Professor Quirrell.”

Under the covers, Dazai’s fingers twitched and a jolt of awareness shot through him. Quirrell! That was what he needed to be doing! Fixing the dragon problem, taking the stone, then destroying Quirrell. He needed to—needed to do that *now* before things spiraled even further from his control.

The energy buzzing behind Dazai’s headache... was that excitement or fear? It was getting so hard to tell these days.

“Someone who isn’t Professor Quirrell,” Blaise said, something dangerous in his tone.

Dazai forced himself to stop listening, ignoring whatever reply Draco had. It didn’t matter. All that mattered was finishing this job for Mori—suddenly, that thought burned even brighter than his overworked agony. Once the thoughts were in his fogged-up mind, they wouldn’t fade. Dazai latched onto that last thought and forced himself to sit up on the bed. Every stretch and pull of muscle was torture. Dazai had to squeeze his eyes shut in order to stay upright when dizziness washed over him.

“Dazai,” Draco said, sounding surprised. “I thought you were asleep.”

Blaise hummed. “You should be sleeping. Lay back down.”

Raising a hand, Dazai waved their concerns off. The motion had his blanket slipping from his head and falling into a pile on his lap. Dazai drew his raised hand to his eyes reflexively at the bright lights. “I *was* asleep.”

“Good job. Now go back to sleep.”

“I’m feeling better,” Dazai lied. He shifted in the bed, trying to move his numb legs to dangle over the cot’s edge. He rubbed at his eyes with a closed fist, trying to rub the lack of focus from his eyes.

One of the other beds creaked. Dazai blinked his eyes open and squinted around the infirmary. Beside him, Draco had sat up abruptly, brows pinched together. “What are you doing?”

Dazai yawned. “Uh.” *Wow.* His thoughts were *really* articulate tonight. Well—better finish this quickly before he said anything *too* stupid. “Sneaking out before Madam Pomfrey comes back?”

They blinked.

“Okay. I’m going to pretend you didn’t just say that.” Blaise said.

“Can you even stand?”

Dazai could only distantly remember that Blaise had practically carried him to the infirmary. He tried to wiggle his toes, but even that simple movement made Dazai’s stomach turn. “Yes.”

They were quiet. Draco watched him with wide eyes. Meanwhile, Blaise was half-perched on the edge of his own cot, looking ready to jump to Dazai’s side in an instant. However, a long moment passed and Dazai had yet to make any major efforts to stand.

“Are you..?”

“I’m working on it.”

Working on it... right. Did moving his legs always take this much concentration?

Dazai kneaded the blanket with white knuckles until his head stopped spinning so horribly. Once he was satisfied, Dazai began to lever himself off the bed.

Only for a hand to press into his chest. It lightly pushed him back into the bed.

Dazai blinked several times, warring against his blurry vision to see...

“George?” He squeaked.

“And Fred!” A voice piped up from behind him.

Smiling, George poked at Dazai's legs until the younger boy drew them back onto the cot. Fred silently pulled the blanket back over Dazai's waist.

"Oh," Blaise said. Dazai and the twins turned to him. "Good evening, you two."

Draco gaped. "*You're* friends with them now too, Blaise?!"

Blaise merely shrugged.

The twins seemed to ignore Draco's outrage, waving amicably to Blaise instead. But before Dazai could try anything, Fred and George turned their full attention back onto him. George put the back of his hand on Dazai's forehead.

"Mild fever."

Fred delicately picked up Dazai's wrist, pressing two fingers into the skin there. "Pulse is weak, Dr. George."

"No it isn't," Dazai intoned. He pried his hand out of the light grip and tucked it safely under the covers.

George shook his head, tutting. "He's clearly delusional with fever. Poor thing. You're recommendation, Dr. Fred?"

"Plenty of rest," Fred said, tone falling just short of serious, "a good prank or two. Not trying to stand up when he looks about a second away from passing out."

Dazai scowled. He was too exhausted to try playing along right now. All of the clever remarks he usually spit out were trampled somewhere behind the pain of just being awake right now. "I have too many things to do to just lie around. What are you two even doing here?" He paused. "There isn't a wild beast loose in Gryffindor tower by chance, is there?"

The twins shared a look.

"No?" They said cautiously.

Dazai nodded, even though that simple movement pounded angrily in his skull. He shot a surreptitious glance in Draco's direction. They couldn't have this conversation with the other boy present. Not unless Dazai was willing to bring him into their gang, which...

No. Dazai wouldn't officially instate Draco until the boy gave up on his silly pureblood notions. It was too violent for infighting, and Dazai wouldn't have it.

Blaise seemed to catch on to the predicament fairly quickly. "A fire-breathing monster got loose in our common rooms," He explained carefully. When the twins' eyes widened in comprehension, he continued, "Everything is under control for now."

"Professor Snape caught it?" Draco asked.

"Sure."

Dazai hummed. “We left him bleeding out on a bed, actually.”

Draco’s mouth dropped open. “*What?!”*

The twins gawped, too.

“He’s probably fine,” Blaise cut in. He toyed with the torn collar of his shirt. “No worse off than we are.”

Fred’s face morphed into one of concern. “Aw, you were hurt too, Blaise?”

“Only a little.”

“It’s *this* idiot who got himself really hurt,” Draco sniped, pointing his thumb in Dazai’s direction. He glared at the twins, as if they were somehow at fault for Dazai’s poor well-being. “Madam Pomfrey wants him to rest. He doesn’t need you two blood traitors bothering him!”

Fred and George bristled. They stood up a bit straighter, one at each of Dazai’s sides.

“It’s fine.” Dazai pinched the bridge of his nose. “They’re fine, Draco.”

He was too tired for this.

When Dazai looked up again, it was to the twins hovering over him. Draco was still glaring in their direction. Dazai sighed.

“It’s past curfew now, right?” He asked.

The twins nodded.

Dazai met the twins eyes, one then the other. He waited until he had their undivided attention to begin speaking. “You’ll have to take one of your hidden passages, then. Stop by the Slytherin common rooms on your way back. Make sure everything is safe.”

Fred and George blinked. Then, frowning, they said, “Sure thing, Snakey.”

Those two didn’t sound very certain. Hopefully, they would figure out what he needed them to do when they got there. Dazai didn’t have the energy in him to carefully describe that he needed them to charm the dragon’s secret passage shut without Draco also figuring it out. This would have to do. Worst case scenario, the twins got mauled by the dragon and it broke loose. But what was two more infirmary occupants, really?

“Great.” It was really fantastic luck that the twins came to the infirmary. It saved Dazai the trouble of having to hunt them down in this condition.

Actually... why *were* they here? Fred and George hadn’t answered him before.

Dazai glanced between them, suspicious. But before he could ask a second time, Fred was fixing the blankets around him again. Dazai buried his face in it.

“You were supposed to be on vacation,” Fred said, brushing back Dazai’s bangs, “Somehow, you look considerably worse than before.”

Someone ruffled his hair. Dazai squawked.

“You’ve got to stop worrying us like this, Snakey,” George said. “I like the ponytail, though. It’s a nice look.”

Oh. Dazai had forgotten about that. He reached back to tug it out, pouting when hair fell down into his face and around his ears again.

George snorted. “Or not.”

Dazai flapped a heavy hand. “For the record, I *was* on vacation.”

“No you weren’t.” Blaise drawled, drawing the twin’s attention to him. Dazai didn’t look up, suddenly too tired to lift his neck. “He’s been practicing magic until it made him sick the entire time.”

Blaise was a *backstabbing little rat.*

“ Oh?” The twins hummed.

Dazai winced.

“Don’t look like that, Snakey,” George said, voice soft. He rested a hand on Dazai’s hair and brushed the tangled locks around. His hand was warm.

“Let your big brothers worry about you.” Fred hummed. “Merlin knows you don’t take care of yourself enough.”

They nodded seriously. Dazai had to turn his head away when he felt his cheeks heating up—everyone at Hogwarts was disgustingly sentimental. There was a warm feeling bubbling up in Dazai’s chest. It was gross.

Across the room, Blaise met his eyes with two raised, amused brows. Dazai’s nose scrunched up.

“If you don’t stop with these self-sacrificing plans of yours,” George began with a pinched brow. Fred finished, “We’ll just have to follow you around all the time and protect you from your own bad decisions.”

Suddenly, Draco cut in, “As if Professor Snape would let you idiots loiter around the Slytherin common rooms!”

Dazai blanched. To fuss over him?

Professor Snape would totally let them do that.

“ We have ways,” Fred said, “of sneaking in. Who’s to say we haven’t already been all over your little Slytherin secrets?”

Draco bristled. “You can’t do that—I'll tell my father!” He scowled when the twins’ only response was to start laughing. “And stop *petting* my subordinate!”

The hand on Dazai’s head momentarily stilled. Dazai blinked up at George to see the older student watching his expression closely. Dazai shrugged. He was quickly finding that he didn’t really care about the hand running through his hair. It was unfamiliar, but...

The more he thought about it, actually, the more self-conscious Dazai became. He scowled, mostly to himself.

George snorted. He tucked a stray hair behind Dazai’s ear, then let his hand fall to his side. Dazai’s shivered at the gentle gesture and looked away.

There was a deep frown etched between Draco’s eyes, and a considering look like he was trying to dissect their relationship. Unfortunately for Draco, Dazai himself had no intention to ever break down this strange friendship he had with the twins. Labeling it as anything other than “boss-subordinate” just made him sick and confused. Dazai was sick enough as it was with No Longer Human.

With a melodramatic sigh, Dazai collapsed back into his pillow. “Well, I’m tired. Get lost, you two.”

Fred and George made matching sounds of amusement.

“Sure thing,” George said with one last ruffle to Dazai’s hair before the blanket was drawn up over the boy’s head again. “See you tomorrow.”

“He’s going to be resting tomorrow,” Draco interrupted pointedly. “In the Slytherin common rooms. Keep your slimy hands out of there.”

There was a lull in the conversation, where Dazai imagined the twins to be grinning. The blanket covered his eyes, but Dazai found he wasn’t missing much—not when he knew everyone in the room well enough to guess at their expressions.

“Still, we’d better get moving before Madam Pomfrey catches us sneaking around after curfew. And we have to stop by the Slytherin rooms too, right?”

Dazai hummed. He heard Blaise do the same from his bed.

Draco made an annoyed sound. “No.”

The twins stepped away from Dazai’s cot and towards the exit. They gave their final farewells to Blaise first, then, “Take a nice, long nap, will you, Snakey? You push yourself way too hard for a first-year slacker, so learn to rely on your friends sometime! Night, kiddo!”

The door was sliding shut quietly behind them before Dazai even found the energy to raise his hand in goodbye.

Kiddo. That was a new one.

Once they were gone, Draco let out a breath. “The nerve of those two,” He grumbled. “I can’t believe you’re friends with them now too, Blaise.”

“I’m not,” Blaise said. “We just have a common interest.”

Dazai hummed, amusement flickering to life beneath his exhaustion.

“Go to sleep,” Blaise and Draco said in time.

“You got it, Boss.”

After that, it didn’t take long for Dazai to slip into oblivion once again, all the fight smothered out of him now. The sounds of Draco growling about blood traitors and Blaise’s apathetic replies were somehow soothing. Dazai could *almost* convince himself that his whole body didn’t ache to listen to it.

Almost, he thought, a lance of pain grabbing onto his skull.

Maybe five minutes later, the infirmary door opened. Dazai’s eyes shot open, prepared for an attack. The way his entire body stiffened up must have been too obvious, because not a second later and Madam Pomfrey was soothing, “It’s just us, boys. Good to see none of you wandered off on me.”

Dazai blinked.

Us?

“ Good evening, Professor Snape,” Blaise greeted with a flat voice.

“Hello, Professor.”

Dazai forced himself upright as quickly as he dared, the blanket falling from his head and puddling around his waist. “Professor.” He blinked against his headache.

Professor Snape’s eyes snapped straight to Dazai. On his face, there was a thin frown and two eyes apparently searching for wounds. There was a long cut on Snape’s nose—red and weeping. Dazai didn’t think it would scar, but the man was lucky the dragon had narrowly missed his eye. Professor Snape’s cloak was in disarray. A few patches of blood were visible on the dark material.

“You didn’t die,” Dazai said, beaming sloppily. “Good job, Sir.”

Snape’s glare lingered on Dazai for a long moment before turning onto Blaise and Draco as if he hadn’t heard the other boy speak. “How are your wounds?”

“The boys are alright, Severus,” Pomfrey interjected. She was smiling fondly in the potion master’s direction. Walking across the room, she pulled away the curtain surrounding one of the empty cots, then turned on her heel to face Snape. “Now sit down and let me take a look at that cut.”

“That won’t be necess—”

Madam Pomfrey glowered.

“...right.”

Amused, Dazai watched as Professor Snape silently crossed the infirmary and took the bed on Dazai’s other side. Pomfrey nodded. However, before she pulled out her wand to heal the professor, she turned back to Dazai. She reached out and held something for Dazai to take. He blinked, not having noticed the matron brought something other than Professor Snape back with her. Dazai took the offered object with a curious frown bending his lips. It crinkled beneath his fingers with a familiar weight.

A small, plastic bag of snack foods sat in the palm of his hand. It seemed to be glaring him down.

Dazai wondered if the disgust was showing on his face.

Madam Pomfrey didn’t say another word before turning back to Snape. Small mercies.

Dazai tucked the snacks into his side, trying fruitlessly to put them out of everyone’s (and his *own*) view. Just thinking about it made him sick. His first trip to the infirmary. Unbandaged arms. Madam Pomfrey. Doctor Mori. It could all blend together so easily.

He wanted to go back to that dreamless sleep very suddenly.

“What are you three still doing here?” Professor Snape asked the room. While he spoke, Pomfrey poked a tentative finger at one of his cuts. The professor winced minutely. “It’s well past curfew now, and unless a few scratches require overnight monitoring now, I would advise you stop chattering amongst yourselves and return to bed.”

Something about that harsh voice tore Dazai from his thoughts.

Pomfrey huffed. “They’re just boys, Severus. A little play after curfew won’t hurt them. I was letting them chat for a while before sending them off.” She paused, pulling out her wand and giving it a small wave. Instantly, the open cut on Snape’s face taped itself back together. Pomfrey nodded. “Anyway, Mr. Dazai will have to stay overnight, I’m afraid.”

Abruptly, Snape jerked away from Pomfrey. He leaned forward, narrowed eyes searching Dazai up-and-down with much more scrutiny than he had moments earlier. Dazai frowned, leaning away unconsciously. He wondered what Snape noticed, making such a distressed face like that. Was it the lingering traces of blood under Dazai’s nose? The heavy bags under his eyes? Or the pale set to his face that spoke of bone-deep exhaustion?

Before the professor could take his inspection too far, Madam Pomfrey had a hand on Snape's chest and was pushing him back. Snape fell back into his seat with a glare.

"The lad is *fine,* Severus," She said, letting out an exasperated, if fond, breath. "He's gone and overworked himself again, is all. He only needs to sleep it off. Preferably where I can keep an eye on him."

Snape blinked, long and slow. Only after taking a deep breath did he allow himself to nod and relax enough for Pomfrey to continue treatment.

"Speaking of," the matron lowered her voice and shot a subvert look in Blaise and Draco's directions, "that is something we should discuss."

Alone. Dazai interpreted. *That is something we should discuss alone.*

They were quiet for a second as Pomfrey healed another scrape over. Once that cut was no longer bleeding, Snape whipped his attention onto the other Slytherins present. "You two," he barked.

Draco's spine snapped straight. Across from him, Blaise tilted his head in askance.

"Out. Wait for me in the hall and I will escort you back to the common rooms." Snape stared them down, "Do *not* wander off. Do *not* get attacked by a monster."

"A monster... " Draco mumbled to himself as he stood. "Did you not catch it, Sir?"

"Do *not* ask questions."

Draco's mouth clicked shut, and he hurried to follow directions. Blaise trailed after him with a friendly wave goodbye to Dazai as they passed. Dazai watched them leave the room numbly.

Professor Snape didn't speak until the door was fully shut.

"What did you do now, problem child?"

"Uh," Dazai said, "nothing?"

Snape's glare only deepened like he was trying to dissect Dazai on the spot. It wasn't an entirely unfamiliar look. Dazai tensed up unwittingly, his mind screaming, *Doctor Mori, Doctor Mori, Doctor Mori—*. But Snape's hand wasn't poised on a scalpel and there was more concern in his gaze than there was morbid interest.

"Don't harass the poor boy, Severus," Pomfrey said, cutting off Dazai's thoughts and Snape's glare in one fell swoop.

Professor Snape straightened on the cot. He didn't take his eyes off of Dazai, though.

The matron hummed. Then, quietly, she dragged a chair over to the beds and sat. She set it directly between Dazai and the door. Dazai tried not to feel trapped, but there was a stutter in

his chest that was hard to ignore, even with this weary exhaustion begging him to sleep. He steeled himself with a fake-looking grin.

“Let’s talk,” Madam Pomfrey began. She spoke warm and slow, as if coaxing a feral dog. “I’ll try and keep this brief, seeing as its well past curfew and you have two boys waiting for you outside, Severus. And this one needs to rest.”

Snape nodded quickly and tapped his foot impatiently on the tile floor. “What is this about that couldn’t wait until morning?” He asked, tone falling just shy of a growl. When he spoke, Snape’s eyes shot to Dazai’s bandaged wrists, then back to the matron. It was a fast glance—almost too quick to see. But the concern there was palpable.

Grin faltering, Dazai tried to hide his arms beneath the blanket inconspicuously.

He hated this already. At least when the twins were worried, they had the decency to tell a joke about it. They were practically his own age, too. Professor Snape was older. He wasn’t Doctor Mori or Father, but he was...

He was *something.*

Pomfrey must not have noticed the way Dazai’s entire body had gone stiff, because she plowed onward. “I’m concerned about a possible medical condition.”

Dazai blinked. Beside him, Snape did as well.

That wasn’t what Dazai had been expecting.

“This isn’t the first time you’ve come to me for overworking your magic. This level of magical exhaustion is something I normally only see on students that cram for exams by practicing for *days straight,”* She said, a deep furrow in her brow as she looked Dazai over, “But Mr. Zabini was telling me this is the result of casting *one spell?”*

Dazai opened his mouth, then closed it. He tasted the right words in his mouth for a moment. “Not exactly,” he said after a pause, “I was practicing a bit earlier today, too.”

“How long did you practice for, hon?”

“...a while.” He frowned, the exact answer avoiding him. Practicing magic already made him fuzzy around the edges, but that on top of everything else today and Dazai was too tired to recall.

Pomfrey nodded. With a flick of her wrist, a quill and pad of paper floated into her hands from across the room. She wrote something down. When Dazai tried to focus on the words there, his vision blurred. He closed his eyes until everything stopped spinning.

“And after that practice session, how did you feel?” The matron’s quill hovered over the page.

Dazai squinted, trying to remember.

It... couldn't really hurt to be honest, right? If anything, lying about his sickness would only land him in trouble down the line. No Longer Human was already hard enough to explain without throwing this into the mix of problems for Dazai to deal with. As long as it didn't interfere with his learning magic with the Loyalty Club—after all, Mori had seemed keen on Dazai mastering magic eventually.

"I had to lay down," He admitted finally. "But I was fine to walk after that."

While Madam Pomfrey began to write something down, Dazai turned his attention onto Professor Snape. The man was silent through Pomfrey's interrogation, a crease in his brow the only indication he was processing the information. When Snape noticed Dazai watching him, he leveled the boy with a glare.

The sound of quill on paper stole Dazai's attention back. "After a couple hours of spellcasting, let's say, you were that unwell?"

"That's not possible," Snape said finally.

"And yet here we are." Pomfrey tapped her quill on the page, expression contemplative. She read over her notes. "A low threshold for spell casting," Pomfrey circled a string of words, "with an incredibly high sensitivity for magic... curious."

"*Concerning,"* Snape bit out.

"Curious *and* concerning." She nodded. "Certainly, you have the ability to perform magic, but your body isn't fit to handle the strain, I suppose. Unfortunately, I think any form of magical treatment would only make your condition worse."

Condition. No Longer Human was a *condition* now.

It was almost funny, watching two wizards attempt to explain Dazai's ability without the context of what it actually was. *Almost.* Dazai still hated the way their intense gazes lingered over him with concern. No Longer Human roiled in Dazai's stomach, and he held himself back from correcting their assumptions. The most he could do was to sit up straighter and to bend their ignorance to his benefit.

Somehow.

"It's not a big deal," Dazai said. "I've been improving."

Madam Pomfrey frowned and Snape's heavy gaze deepened.

"This is an *improvement?"*

Dazai nodded, then shrugged.

And it *was*. Huge improvement, actually. Compared to earlier this year, when Dazai couldn't spell cast at all, even a tiny spark was significant. And the meager flames Dazai had managed in the past were nothing next to what he had accomplished tonight. There was a lot about

Dazai's magic abilities that had improved, but judging by the tense looks Pomfrey and Snape were wearing, they didn't agree.

"...Okay," Madam Pomfrey said after a moment. She wrote something down that Dazai couldn't make out. When she looked up from her medical notes, worry was thick in her eyes. "I think we need to make some changes to your lesson plan. Severus?"

Snape nodded, serious. "Focus on controlling magic safely and less on casting every spell in the curriculum."

"Exactly."

Dazai blinked, his mouth dropping open. "That's not necessary," He said before he could stop himself. At their confused looks, Dazai continued, "I just need to practice more than the others."

He needed to learn magic. *Needed*— that's what Mori wanted, right? Magic and the Philosopher's Stone. Dazai grasped the objectives in his mind.

Professor Snape let out a heavy breath. "Do you not see how that's a problem, brat?"

"The fact that you've had to visit me at *all* for this is concerning enough," Pomfrey said. "Let alone more than once. I'm worried that if you push yourself much further without proper supervision, you may do lasting damage."

Lasting damage.

Those words hung in the air for a long moment.

Pomfrey and Snape watched him, as if letting the gravity of that statement settle in. Dazai frowned.

"Do you think using magic could kill me?" He asked, voice devoid of emotion. He held his breath. No Longer Human buzzed in his skull, asking, *do I wish it would?*

At the question, Professor Snape's head snapped up. He stared down Madam Pomfrey with a look of intense ferocity.

The matron paused. Then, after a weighty second, she set her quill down in her lap. "I've never seen someone react to magic in this way before," Pomfrey said with a tight voice. "I don't know."

Dazai's heart skipped a beat. For that split second, everyone else in the room seemed to still as well. Then, with dawning outrage in his eyes, Professor Snape growled, "*Poppy—"*

"I've been researching the possibility of a health condition since Mr. Dazai first came to me for this. Tomorrow morning, I'll reach out to some contacts at St. Mungo's Hospital—see if they've ever treated a case like this. In the meantime, Severus, do let his other professors know that he shouldn't be casting more than one spell per class." She turned to Dazai, "Any sign of dizziness, and I want you to stop casting immediately, am I clear?"

Before Dazai could even open his mouth to reply, Snape cut in, “That includes your little practice sessions with Mr. Malfoy.”

“Absolutely,” Pomfrey agreed before Dazai could argue.

Shit.

“Normally,” the matron continued, easily ignoring the emotion flickering on Dazai’s face, “I would contact your parents about something like this.”

Dazai frowned. This was nothing Mori and Father wouldn’t already know. Still, the idea of Pomfrey speaking with Mori made his throat tighten uncomfortably. He coughed into his sleeve, then looked up to see what sort of expression the others were wearing. When he looked over, Dazai saw that Snape was watching him with searching eyes, analyzing his reaction for some reason. Dazai blinked, then schooled his expression.

Pomfrey continued, unbidden. “But your father is a muggle, isn’t he?”

Dazai nodded numbly.

“If that’s the case, I’ll wait to send an owl until I’ve made more progress in research to contact your family. If that’s alright with you, Severus?”

“Yes,” Snape said. He glowered down at Pomfrey’s notes, then turned a surprisingly warm look onto Dazai. The mafioso sat up straighter in anticipation. “Go to sleep. I expect that you won’t be wandering the halls again tonight, boy.”

Dazai nodded stiffly. Beside him, Pomfrey made an amused sound.

“Good,” The potions master said as he stood. The cuts on his face were healed over now, and no sign of blood was left to indicate the attack had happened at all. “I’ll tell the professors not to expect you in class tomorrow. Sleep in. Under no circumstances should you attempt to cause trouble.”

“I wouldn’t do that to you, Sir.”

Snape raised a brow. Then, with a nod goodbye to the matron, he left the infirmary. Just before the door closed, Dazai thought he heard Draco’s voice.

“*Sir, is Dazai okay?”*

Dazai yawned.

With a fond sigh, Madam Pomfrey pulled a blanket up to Dazai’s shoulders and lightly pushed him back into the bed. “Get some sleep, dear. You have a good lot of friends—I'm sure they’ll be eager to talk with you tomorrow when you’re better rested. They seem to care about you a lot.”

Dazai blinked. Despite everything that had happened tonight, sleep came to him within seconds. It was a peaceful, black dream.

Dazai didn’t have the energy left to even craft a nightmare.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting!!! yall are the best!!
hope everyone's day is going well :)

Dazai's Gang of Really Good Friends

Chapter Summary

> Dazai is finally ready to take his final steps against Quirrell's mafia: stealing the Philosopher's Stone!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai's new curriculum was horrible.

In every single class since that fateful night, Dazai's time spent practicing spells had been cut to practically nothing at all. During class, if he didn't succeed within the first couple attempts, a professor was suddenly at his side forcing him to stop. McGonagall's stern "wand down, Mr. Dazai," still rung in his ears painfully. And, *sure,* Dazai's headache was more-or-less abated and his nausea was only a distant hum, *but still.*

Annoyingly, Draco also seemed to be convinced that he needed to worry about Dazai's condition. Whatever Draco had seen the other night in the infirmary within Dazai's shivering form, he was completely turned off of their normal Loyalty Club activities. For the last week, their club had done nothing but meet, chat, and do homework. It was...

...not unpleasant.

Dazai sighed and leaned into his right palm. He toyed with the black king in his other hand, rolling it on its side. The only good news that had come to him this week had been Fred and George. Dazai had met briefly with the twins over breakfast to hear that they had, in fact, locked the dragon in its secret passage.

With Draco refusing to let him practice spells and there being nothing urgent to research, Dazai was stuck sitting around the common room for most of his week. He couldn't even sneak into the restricted section of the library! Ever since Pomfrey's change to his curriculum, the professors had taken to keeping a close eye on Dazai. Sneaking in now would be a nightmare. The sheer magnitude of *boredom* Dazai had been forced into was a deep, yawning thing. With all of his other pastimes stolen from him, Dazai was really only left with two choices: steal the Philosopher's Stone now or kill himself.

Dazai tilted his king too far, and it clattered over onto the board. He let out a weary breath. Even chess was boring. How did these other brats just *not do things?* It was horrible, and burning, and his thoughts were too loud—

"You're thinking problematic things again, aren't you?"

Dazai groaned and face-planted into the chess board.

From the sofa, Blaise hummed. “Stop that.”

“I’m *bored!* How do you people live like this?”

“Quite easily.”

“Well, that’s gross.” He kicked his feet childishly under the table. Not for the first time, Dazai found himself wishing he could at least toy with his knife.

Blaise made a noise of vague agreement. “If you need to feel productive, maybe you should do your homework.”

Sitting up, Dazai stared blankly in Blaise’s direction. The other boy was lounging across the sofa chair, sedately flicking through a textbook. Dazai recognized the cover as being one that he had finished at the very beginning of the year: History of Magic. Interesting, but not particularly helpful. Although it had helped to guide his research quite a lot. Dazai had discovered that magic had a very long and very bloody history, not in the least including the more recent Death Eater and pureblood supremacy conflicts.

When he realized he was being watched, Blaise looked up. He met Dazai’s gaze with a slow blink.

“You know I don’t actually need your permission to...” Dazai frowned. They weren’t alone in the common rooms—a few upperclassmen were loitering around. He chose his words carefully after a pause, “...to sneak around.”

To steal the stone, Dazai said with a quirk of his lips.

Blaise’s eyes narrowed. “Is that a good idea?” The other snake asked, a down-turn to his lips.

Dazai frowned. He sat up straighter. “It’s a great idea.”

Now, the shallow frown on Blaise’s face seemed to bleed worry. “It *was* a fine idea. Until Professor Snape lectured us all on being more delicate with you.” Blaise ran a finger over the cover of his book, then schooled his expression. “You’re too reckless with your own life. If we do this plan, what are the odds you push yourself too far again?”

Dazai rolled the idea around in his head. He sat the king piece back up while he thought. All of the other pieces had been pushed to the side, making room for Dazai to rest his head there again if he so wanted. And the more Blaise talked, the more appealing crashing on the chess board sounded. “I know my own limits,” he finally said, shuffling in place and feeling oddly stiffled.

And it was true—the only reason Dazai had wiped himself out the other day with the dragon was *necessity*. He hadn’t been expecting the dragon to hatch,and, given the time constraint, using a spell until he was *that sick* had been the only option. But everything from here on out would be according to Dazai’s design, barring the only few unknowns left in the equation.

“Anyway,” Dazai continued. He plucked a pawn from the table and flicked it in Blaise’s direction. It clapped into the arm of the sofa, then fell to the floor. “We’re on a time limit, in case you forgot.”

“I know that,” Blaise said. “But you staying healthy is more important.”

Dazai blinked, dumbfounded. “No it's not.”

Quirrell getting the Philosopher’s Stone and making an immortal wizard mafia was *significantly* more important. Dazai couldn’t say as much with other Slytherins around, but he tried to get the message across with a bewildered look. Professor Quirrell would be going for the stone soon. They really didn’t have time to be fussing over useless things. Dazai tossed another pawn to make his point.

Blaise smacked it out of the air before it could collide with his face. “Of course it is. You’re an idiot.”

“Yup.” Dazai grinned. “Now, are you going to help or not?”

With a sigh, Blaise sat up. His features were drawn up into something serious and vaguely concerned. That was an emotion he wore a lot lately—*concern.* Dazai didn’t know what to make of it. He wanted to say it annoyed him, but...

Dazai shook the thought from his head. He saw Blaise trapped beneath the dragon last week, beaten and bloody. And...

Yeah. He could understand that concern, maybe.

Then, with a crashing certainty, Blaise's eyes widened in realization. The stir-crazy weariness in Dazai's voice must have given it away, because not a second later, and Blaise whispered, “You want to go for the stone tonight.”

Dazai nodded. “That’s the plan.”

To be honest, the idea of waiting any longer made him sick. All this coddling was reminding him too much of being home. Locked in his room day-in-day-out. *He* didn’t do things. Things happened *to him.* And really, it wasn’t that he needed to be productive, like Blaise had said. Dazai just wanted some semblance of control over the situation.

“There’s no stopping you, is there?”

“Nope!”

Blaise sighed. He closed his eyes, and held that drooping position for a long few seconds. When he finally looked up again, Blaise was wearing his characteristic look of apathetic boredom. “Alright,” he said. “What’s the plan, Boss?”

“First,” Dazai grinned, “we need the twins to let our dragon out.”

Dazai leaned up against the wall, staring around the corridor with a plain expression. The torch lights overhead were empty and the hall was cast in shadow. Sneaking out after curfew was too easy. At his side, Blaise's bored expression seemed to agree.

"Is this your first time sneaking out after hours?" Dazai asked. He already knew the answer.

Blaise hummed. "Yes. But with you around, it seemed inevitable."

Dazai nodded, then pressed the back of his skull into the wall. They had trapped the dragon especially close to the Slytherin common rooms—it was critical that the twins arrived quickly. After all, if they stood around for too long, Snape would eventually sniff them out. Dazai was starting to think the man had a talent for it.

Blaise shot him a curious look. "The twins *are* coming." He reassured.

"I know."

Damn. Dazai tried to mask whatever nerves Blaise had seen in his expression. He wasn't *nervous,* just... eager to get moving. He didn't like the idea of an immortality-granting stone just lying around. Didn't like the idea that Quirrell was in the final stages of taking it for himself. He *also* didn't like the idea that Mori had given him a mission that Dazai could just as easily fail as he could succeed.

Remembering the stone, Dazai raised a hand to pat the chest of his cloak. Folded neatly within an inner pocket, a small, blue silk bag lied hidden away. It was too tiny to fit anything more than a few coins, really. Later tonight, it would be just the perfect size for smuggling a Philosopher's Stone.

But one thing at a time. First, he needed to twins to free the dragon.

Of course, Dazai could easily unlock the twins' charm himself. Dazai bit back the sting of No Longer Human in his mind as it twitched towards the secret passageway. He shot a subvert glance to Blaise. The other boy was loyal and fierce and kind, but he didn't know a single thing about special abilities. No Longer Human yearned to nullify the magic keeping that secret door shut. But with Blaise watching...

Best not, Dazai decided.

"Heads up."

Dazai blinked out of his thoughts, turning to Blaise with a curious frown. Blaise craned his neck towards the hall. Following the boy's gaze, Dazai squinted into the dark. Fred and George silently clambered down the dungeon stairs. When they caught sight of Blaise and Dazai from across the hall, they beamed. Dazai waited until they were closer to raise a hand in greeting.

“Good evening, Boss!” They cheered quietly. “A little Blaise-shaped birdy told us we were up to no good tonight.”

“Sure,” Dazai hummed. “Aren’t we always, though?”

They snickered. After a quiet moment, Dazai nudged them at the secret passageway. Behind which, their Norwegian Ridgeback lied in wait. Luckily, the stone walls were thick enough that the clatter of its claws couldn’t be heard from this side.

Fred beamed. He reached around his cloak, pulling out his wand a second later. “Finally letting this little rascal out!”

“Only so many nights we can sneak leftover dinners in for her without getting caught.” George agreed, “Did you know dragons will eat mashed potatoes?”

Dazai did not know that. Although he was relieved to know that they had been feeding the dragon. Somehow, keeping it alive had completely sipped his mind. Just another reason why the Weasley twins made for perfect subordinates, he supposed.

“*Her?”* Blaise echoed.

“Ron said she’s a female when we let him in the other day,” George explained. “Our little brother is still convinced he can tame her and keep her as a pet. We didn’t have the heart to tell him otherwise!”

“She’s completely feral,” Fred said. He raised his wand, then swished it through the air in a vague shape. “But you *did* promise him a pet dragon, Snakey.”

Dazai snorted. “He can keep it if he can tame it.” He paused. “Is it still called Eggy?”

The twins grinned. George smirked. “Ron hasn’t decided on a name yet. Says it has to be *perfect.”*

“So we’ve just been calling her Egg,” Fred said, “Do you think it’ll stick?”

“I think Egg is going to attack you no matter what you call it by,” Dazai told them sagely. “So sure.”

Fred’s chuckle seemed to agree. Hovering over the stone wall, his wand suddenly stalled. He turned, making sure to look Dazai in the eyes. Dazai stood up straighter at the attention.

“Alright. One tap on the stone and Egg’ll be free.” He frowned. “Are you sure you don’t want Ron to come with us?”

At Dazai’s side, Blaise hummed. “He’s been on your side since the start, hasn’t he? Him and Hermione.”

Dazai blinked, then shrugged. “I’m sure. This is fine.”

He remembered Ron walking with him to the Forbidden Forest. Remembered the boy's adamant dislike for pranking and rule-bending ever since that day. What they were doing tonight was leagues worse than what they did over winter break. Dazai hated to admit it, but Ron didn't want to be a part of this so Dazai wasn't going to force him. The reason Dazai didn't invite Hermione was much the same. In the end, it was probably for the best. The more people he involved in tonight's heist, the more likely it was they would be caught sneaking around. Dazai nodded to himself—simplicity was best, and he had all the help he needed in the form of Blaise and the Weasley twins.

Fred and George merely nodded. "If you're certain."

He was. Dazai looked between his companions. Fred and George were bouncing on their feet with unmasked excitement. Beside him, Blaise was calm, collected, and thoughtful. Blaise might just do anything if he thought it was what Dazai wanted, the mafioso thought.

His subordinates. His *friends.* Dazai grinned. A gang with only four members wasn't such a small thing when they were loyal like this.

"Alright, gang!" Dazai whispered, wiping himself of anything but excitement, "Who's ready to run?"

Three pairs of eyes blinked at him.

"Run?"

Dazai nodded. "To the third floor, somewhere. Only I'm not sure just where it is yet." Taking pity on their blank expression, Dazai explained, "This Philosopher's Stone thing must be giving off a ton of latent magical energy. A magical creature like Egg will be drawn to it."

Blaise titled his head, eyes narrowed in thought. "So when we let the dragon free, it will naturally seek the closest area with the most magic?"

"And that happens to be where the stone is." Dazai nodded. "That's what happened with the troll on Halloween, at least."

Blaise nodded. Beside them, the twins' mouth dropped open, then closed.

Oh. Right. Dazai had never told them about his Halloween adventure, had he? But even so, Fred and George didn't look very shocked at his announcement. Surprised, sure. But nothing so dramatic that Dazai might expect from such a reveal. His lips thinned, curiosity and suspicion littering his mind. The twins shared a look. Whatever silent messages were flitting between them, Dazai could never know.

"It's somewhere on the third floor." Dazai said evenly, turning his attention to the corridor wall without another thought, "But I can't be sure exactly where. Think of Egg as a dousing rod leading us to the stone." He frowned. "We'll ditch the dragon once we find the right room —let it run around the halls. That's a suitable distraction, isn't it?"

Fred and George nodded slowly, evidently considering the information Dazai had just dumped on them all. However, it was Blaise who interjected.

“How are we going to catch Egg again?”

Dazai raised a brow.

“For Ron,” Blaise clarified. “I’m not letting you catch it with that incendio trick again, Boss.”

Dazai rolled the idea around in his head for a second. “I wouldn’t worry about that.”

Once they had the Philosopher’s Stone, the dragon would follow it around, anyway. Still, Dazai didn’t find himself caring. Whether they caught Egg again or not, Dazai wasn’t convinced they could tame it. If Ron wanted to try, he was more than welcome to. But as far as Dazai was concerned, the appeal of sneaking a dragon around had ended at about the point he realized immortality was at stake.

Even just thinking about it made him sick. Or maybe that was the lingering illness from his last trip the infirmary. Regardless...

“Let Egg out.” Dazai shook his head and steeled his expression. “Let’s get moving before someone catches us breaking curfew.”

They watched him for a moment, varying degrees of thoughtfulness written across their faces. Finally, Fred tapped his wand against the wall.

Click.

Dazai felt it before the stone doorway swung open. The rigid magic in the air snapped apart, then dispersed aimlessly. It buzzed against his skin and disappeared. In some faraway part of his mind, Dazai tried to commit that pattern of magic to mind. A spell that could lock other people out would be incredibly helpful to know. But he only had a second to think about those applications.

The flap of wings and the clatter of claws on stone stole Dazai’s breath away before he was really aware of it. Beside him, Dazai felt Blaise tense up as well.

“Here she comes,” Fred announced, taking a half-step away from the door.

George moved closer to Blaise and Dazai. He stood directly between them and the dragon, but Dazai wasn’t sure if the positioning was intentional or not. “Let’s hope your plan works, Snakey.”

“It will,” Dazai said.

“Good.” George grinned, “Because Egg is coming out now—!”

A familiar, black blur bulleted out of the doorway, buffeting Dazai’s hair as it shot past. It curved through the air, only the flash of dangerous claws showing where it would go. Egg’s

wings flapped, and she vanished up the stairs.

They were still for a split second.

Then, like a shock of electricity, the four of them jolted into action.

Dazai sprinted after the dragon. The sound of shoes clambering against stone told him the others were following with just as much haste. He gripped at the stairwell rail to drag himself up. By the time he reached the top, Dazai abruptly stopped. Behind him, several shoes skidded to a halt as well.

“Where did she go?” Blaise asked at the same time the twins asked, “Why did you stop?”

Dazai took a heavy breath. “It’s faster than us,” he explained, “We’ll have to go to the third floor and catch it there, rather than following it.” Whirling on the twins, Dazai asked, “Do you two know any shortcuts to the third-floor corridor?”

Fred and George met each other's eye and seemed to silently confer. Dazai took the moment to catch his breath after sprinting up the stairs. After a pause, George said, “Not directly.”

“But we can get you pretty close.” Fred added.

“Good enough.”

They really only needed to catch the dragon going for a specific door or passage. Dazai couldn’t risk accidentally opening the wrong door and running into a professor or wasting his time on a dead-end. There was no room for error.

Next thing Dazai knew, they were running once again—trailing behind as the Weasley twins expertly navigated the convoluted Hogwarts hallways. Dazai trusted their pathing. He turned a corner, close on Fred’s heels. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Dazai tried to commit the maze of Hogwarts to memory. He lost it halfway through. These halls twisted and bent. They moved on their own accord and were lined with the living paintings Dazai could never bear to look at.

Their group briefly came to a stop. It was only just long enough for the twins to do something with their wands and a tall, flowering plant. Dazai didn’t recognize the motion, but he felt the magic fluctuations in the air when a painting on the wall swung out just seconds later. Fred and George turned over their shoulders to motion Blaise and Dazai inside the passageway the frame had been concealing.

Dazai passed through the threshold with a jerky nod to the twins and they each offered him a sly grin. Then, still wearing those expressions of boyish excitement, the twins grabbed the painting frame and threw it closed.

The excitement on their faces almost made Dazai forget just what they were doing. And, more importantly, *why.*

Immortality. Quirrell. *Mori.*

Dazai wasn't sure which directive was more pressing. He shook his head as he turned to follow Blaise down the long, secret tunnel. It didn't really matter *why.* Maybe Dazai could convince himself he was doing this all for fun, too. Like it had been at the start of the year. Which wasn't to say that sneaking around wasn't *fun.* It was just...

Well, stealing the Philosopher's Stone wasn't really Dazai's idea anymore, was it? It didn't feel like a rebellion or a game—it felt like a job. Felt like the sticky, black feeling gumming up Dazai's lungs and whispering, "*to never die... what would that be like, I wonder?"*

It was a fancy red stone instead of a fancy red dress.

Firelight suddenly shone through from the end of the tunnel as the far wall opened up. Fred and George urged them to move faster, and Dazai complied easily. Stepping out of the secret passage, Dazai looked around, trying to get a sense of bearing. Blaise rolled up at his side.

"Third floor," Blaise said breathlessly. "I don't see the dragon anywhere."

Dazai hummed, not entirely surprised.

There was a *snap* from behind him. Dazai glanced over his shoulder to watch the twins use their wands to seal the secret passage shut. It looked to be made of stone bricks on this floor —like the one in the dungeons was.

George pointed to their right with his thumb. "The corridor that's off limits is this way," He explained. "You're sure that's where Egg will go?"

"Yup," Dazai said, already walking in the direction George had indicated. There was a quiet second before he heard the others begin to follow.

This time, Dazai made sure to slow his walk down to a crawl. Magical creatures seemed to be repulsed by him—at least intelligent ones like the goblins and ghosts. He wasn't sure how good their ability to sense him was, though. Dazai raised a hand, silently signaling his companions that they would be sneaking now. He couldn't risk scaring Egg off with No Longer Human. Not until he saw which door—secret or not—the dragon was going for.

He heard claws on stone before he even rounded the corner. Next was the sound of wings battering against the wind. A squeak, or maybe a hiss or a growl.

Egg.

Fred appeared at Dazai's side and mouthed the dragon's name without uttering a sound.

Dazai nodded. He jerked his head in the direction of the dragon, then raised his brows.

With a smirk, Fred mutely snuck forward and peeked around the corner. It was quiet for a weighty moment. Dazai felt Blaise and George come up on his other side not long after. He gave them what was hopefully an encouraging smile.

Finally, Fred turned back to them. He was beaming incredibly wide, and Dazai couldn't help but grin back even with these nerves turning him inside-out. "*She's here,"* Fred mouthed.

Dazai nodded. With a look to each of his subordinates, Dazai took in a deep breath, and stepped out from behind the corner. He stared around the hall, careful about making sweeping movements that might startle an unsuspecting dragon hatchling. Looking around, the hall looked just as he remembered it. The long, almost endless corridor of door-after-door. The tall arch of the ceiling, the wash of dust over the floor. Dazai's eyes caught on the end of the hall, where the corner of the wall was still cracked and broken. He looked away quickly, an unwanted memory of the mountain troll standing there flashing in his head. The stench of unwashed flesh clung to Dazai's tongue even now. It rankled the air of his memories. The vice-grip of claws around his ribs, the acid-burn of No Longer Human in his brain...

Suddenly, Blaise's warm weight was at his side. Dazai let out the air he was unwittingly holding onto. When Fred hovered over his other shoulder, Dazai was finally able to force himself instead to quickly scan the hallway for Egg.

Black wings batted against the door, claws scrambling to gain purchase. Every few seconds, a flicker of sparks left the dragon's mouth. It wasn't enough to catch the door aflame. And actually... Dazai recognized that door! Albeit only vaguely. On Halloween he had brazenly attempted to unlock that door, hoping to find something interesting inside. Only when he went to open it, Draco and the troll showed up to foil his scheme. *That* was where the Philosopher's Stone was hiding?

What would have happened if he had fully opened it that day, Dazai wondered?

He shook his head, skin prickling. Fred, George, and Blaise stood quietly at his side, evidently waiting for Dazai to lead them. That was right—he had more important things to do than to get lost in the past.

Steal the stone, avoid professor Snape, and hatch a dragon's egg.

Those were still his objectives. With the dragon egg hatched and Snape nowhere to be seen, Dazai's next move was obvious.

Tilting his chin up, Dazai crossed the hall.

Egg must have sensed him already, because not a second later and she was scrambling up the wall. She hissed at them, but didn't swoop to attack. Dazai wondered if Ron really was taming her. Or maybe it was the thrum of No Longer Human keeping Egg away. Regardless... "Good job," Dazai whispered to the dragon, smirking when she angrily batted her tail into the wall, "You've officially become useful. I'll even forgive you for attacking my second in command, maybe."

"I won't," Blaise intoned.

The twins tittered quietly. "Aw, go easy on her!"

"She *is* a wild animal, after all."

Dazai hummed, then shook himself. He turned his attention back to his subordinates. Whether his expression was excited or serious, Dazai wasn't sure. He felt somewhere in

between the two. When Blaise met his gaze with a frown, Dazai tried to settle the strange feeling.

“Alright, gang,” he announced.

All eyes turned to him. With a breath, Dazai reached for the door. He picked it with a bobby pin in record time. It clicked open beneath his fingers within seconds. Dazai’s hand rested on the door handle. He turned to meet Blaise’s eyes, then Fred’s, then George’s. The twins were beaming from ear-to-ear, and even Blaise wore a small, encouraging smile. Unwittingly, a grin split across Dazai’s face.

Exciting, he decided, *This is exciting!*

“Let’s steal the Philosopher’s Stone.”

Chapter End Notes

kind of a weird, clunky chapter to set up the next bit of plot ,,,,
thanks for reading and commenting :) it means a lot

see yall next week!

Fear

Chapter Summary

Guards one and two.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the door opened, a gust of hot, wet air blew out. It buffeted Dazai's hair back and forced a serious frown onto his face. It reeked—whatever was behind this door smelled something awful. Dazai steeled himself. With one last look to each of his subordinates, he let the door swing all the way open.

It was dark. Dazai squinted trying to force his eyes to adjust faster. Taking a tentative step forward pushed him another foot into the darkness. Were there no lights in here? Where would the first of the professors' guards be? Dazai worried the thought with a frown, the uncertainty itching at him.

"Can you guys see anything?" One of the twins asked.

Dazai shrugged, then corrected himself, "No. Can one of you cast —"

Before he could finish, the frantic beat of wings overhead cut him off. Dazai instinctively looked up, but only managed to see the flash of Egg's black wings diving overhead before immediately vanishing into the shadows.

Letting out a breath, Dazai took another step forward.

At the same time, the scuff of claws on tile moved away. Heavy, lumbering. Breathing—Dazai could hear it now—low and hot and *large.* Peeling out of lungs twice Dazai's size. Rancid in a way that the troll's wasn't. It smelled like raw meat. Dazai blinked into the darkness, the realization suddenly thundering down on him:

Something big was in here.

" Cast *lumos."* Dazai told the darkness, serious. When no one replied for a second, Dazai drew the command into his voice, "Fred. Lumos."

"Working on it, Snakey." The reply came from Dazai's side. Fred's voice sounded cautious and whispered. *Good.* He must have reached the same conclusion Dazai had: *the first guard was Hagrid's beast, and it was in the room with them.*

"*Lumos!"*

Over his shoulder, a small, white light flickered to life.

The room was suddenly cast into harsh light and long shadows. Dazai, looking to Fred, saw the twin's face first. Fred's eyes were wide and searching. Probably still adjusting to the light. Dazai turned his focus to Blaise next, who was still pressed up near his side. Dazai stopped cold. The expression on Blaise's face was bloodless and aghast.

"*Dazai,"* He half-whispered.

Feeling icy dread spike at his spine, Dazai followed Blaise's gaze. Followed it to—

To—

Massive black eyes bore into Dazai's skull. Two eyes. No, four. *Six.*

Dazai tried to draw in a breath, but it stuttered and stopped. Those black eyes blinked, three black noses *huffed,* and massive claws clacked on the floor. It was three towering heads on one body. Black fur and hungry eyes. A slobbering, toothy maw.

Of course it would be a dog, Dazai thoughts numbly.

The feeling smothering Dazai's lungs was pure, unadulterated fear. His heart may have stopped beating—his lungs deflated. Dazai could kill his fear of everything but dogs. He didn't mind death or pain. Could even make his mind go blank when Father was glaring down at him. But *dogs—*

He was a child, surrounded by the mafia's mutts. Their fighting dogs. Was a small boy, locked in the kennel. Was a bloody, broken thing. Dog food. Tiny fingers scrambling at the bars of a dog cage, too broken to pick the lock. Someone staring down at him. The dogs staring down at him, too.

The memories flashed unbidden. The trembling of Dazai's hands was just as unwanted.

Blood and teeth, blood and teeth, blood and teeth—!

Something clapped down on Dazai's shoulder. He jolted away from it, expecting the burn of fangs in his skin.

"Dazai!"

Dogs can't talk, was the first thought to pierce Dazai's mind. The childish idea was almost enough to shake Dazai from his memories.

"I think he's having a flashback," the voice continued. "Or a panic attack."

"Shoot, uh—" someone was speaking. Dazai frowned, and the voice continued, soothing, "You're alright. Look, it—*they?*—they aren't coming closer."

Cerberus, Dazai thought instead.

“They’re—” Fred. Was that Fred? “Actually, I think they’re *backing away from us.* Isn’t this supposed to be a ferocious guard?"

Backing away..? Dogs didn’t back away! They snarled and snapped and—

No Longer Human buzzed under his skin, and the massive, three-headed dog whined.

Oh.

Dazai blinked once, then twice, fighting to clear the *(humiliating, childish)* fear clogging up his thoughts. Slowly, his vision wavered back into shaky focus. Fred still held a *lumos* over their heads. It painted the monster in sharp contrast to the black room, and the sight alone was enough to hold Dazai’s breath dead still.

But the beast *was* staying away. Scared off by No Longer Human—of *course* a three-headed dog was magical. It must have been smart enough to recognize Dazai as a magical black hole, just like Egg could. Dazai clamped down on that reassurance and the sting of his own ability. Still, he couldn’t take his eyes off the beast. Couldn't stop the heavy lumbering in his chest.

“This is only the first guard,” Dazai said suddenly. He hoped his voice wasn’t shaking. The dog blinked six times. “Is there a door to the next room?”

There was a pause, then Blaise cleared his throat. He was still standing at Dazai’s side. Only, now that Dazai was really paying attention, he realized that Blaise was standing much closer that before. The other snake was practically pressed up against Dazai’s arm, a warm hand gripping Dazai’s elbow. Dazai tried to focus on the discomfort of being touched. It might have grounded him better if that dog weren’t still staring them down.

The mutt whined, long and low. Dazai’s paled.

“There’s a trap door on the floor,” Blaise said. “That’s it.”

An exit on the floor... Dazai quickly shot his eyes to the ground, but couldn’t make anything out in the shadows before his focus snapped back to the dog.

The room was dark and hot with dog’s breath. So were the kennels back home—

A shadow fell over Dazai’s vision. He flinched backwards half-a-step, face perfectly blank.

“Hey!”

Suddenly, George was standing in front of him. When Dazai took a long, shaking breath, he realized that the dog hadn’t moved at all. It had been George, taking a careful step in front of him. The twin stared down at Dazai, brows scrunched together in obvious worry.

“You with me?”

Dazai opened his mouth to speak. His voice was cold and faraway, and when he forced a word out it lacked all the barb and eager Dazai usual wore. “Obviously.”

George didn't look convinced. With a pained-looking smile, he reached out to corral Dazai within his arms. "Great," he hummed, pushing Dazai away from the dog, "this way, then."

Dazai let himself be guided. Under normal circumstances, a thousand jabs would have thickened themselves on the mafioso's tongue. But in this half-formed memory of dogs and cages, Dazai found his priorities entirely elsewhere. When Dazai tried to stretch his neck to keep his eyes on the beast, Blaise came up behind them and blocked his view.

Blaise offered Dazai a blank, considering frown. He shrugged.

"You coming, Fred?" George asked.

Fred's response came a second later, and the light around them shifted slightly. "Is Dazai through?" He said instead.

George hummed. A second later, Dazai felt himself being passed off to Blaise.

A jolt of pain in Dazai's skull told him that George had just cast a spell before the whispered, "*Alohomora,"* could.

There was a *clank* of a metal lock falling to the ground, open. Then, George was at his side once again. Numbly, Dazai stepped through the trap door. His feet found a ladder before his fear-addled brain could visualize the path in the darkness. He climbed down on shaking hands and feet.

"Dazai is clear!" George called overhead, sounding far-away. Maybe that was the roar of blood rushing through Dazai's ears.

"Coming!"

Dazai descended, blank.

"You alright, Boss?' Blaise whispered, just overhead.

Above them, Dazai heard the trapdoor snap shut. Four sets of footsteps climbing down the ladder echoed around the room. Dazai took a deep, aching breath.

It was strange. He couldn't recall ever having someone stand between him and a dog before.

"Boss?"

Dazai closed his eyes. When he opened them, their encounter with the three-headed dog was completely wiped from his head. Compartmentalized. Forgotten. *Irrelevant.*

(As forgotten as anything could be, like this.)

" Hm?" Dazai hummed, feigning ignorance. He climbed down another rung for a short, mute moment, then asked, "How deep do you think this thing is?"

There was a long, heady pause. Someone sighed.

“I don’t know.”

George made a sound of discontent. Dazai pretended not to hear it. “We’ll take a break when we reach the bottom.”

Dazai felt irritation burn under his skin—replacing the numbness that had replaced the fear. “We’re working against the clock,” He said, voice not lacking in sternness, “No time.”

“There’s time for this, little bro.” Fred cut in.

Dazai opened his mouth to say something snappish back, then thought better of it. He was off his game by a long shot—seeing the dog had surprised him. It was making him shaky and small. Mori would laugh at him for it. Father would try to beat it out of him again.

The one thing Dazai couldn’t face, and his subordinates all knew.

Dazai still wasn’t sure quite what to make of their reactions. He thought he should probably be feeling shame, but locking down fear meant locking down everything. Worry and shame included. All Dazai needed was a head clear enough to know if his subordinates were planning to exploit his newly-unveiled weakness. His hands felt numb on the ladder's metal rungs.

He could still salvage this—

Before he could finish the thought, Dazai’s foot met air.

Climbing down mindlessly, he hadn’t realized that the next rung of the ladder didn’t *exist*. It gave way into open air. Dazai’s heart dropped instinctively as he lost his balance on the ladder. His hands burned against the metal bars as gravity dragged him down. Stale air whipped against Dazai as he fell several feet.

For a second, there was nothing but Dazai and the *snap* of his body on the hard ground.

“Dazai!”

Someone shouted out to him, and the world came tumbling back into focus.

Dazai groaned, wincing minutely when his back protested the fall. His landing hadn’t been soft, but Dazai had been through worse. Although it wasn’t his body that ached the most now, but his head. The base of his skull burned and buzzed. Bringing a hand up to his face, Dazai tried to wipe the pain off. “You’re going to have to jump,” he called to the others, pinching the bridge of his nose, “The ladder stops about—”

“*Oh!”* Blaise shouted suddenly.

“—there.”

A second later, Blaise thudded to the ground right beside Dazai. The other snake made a pained sound.

“You hurt?” Dazai asked, voice carefully blank. His head ached, aimlessly.

Blaise hissed. “What did we land on?” He asked instead.

The floor below him *shifted.*

Immediately, Dazai’s eyes sought out Blaise’s in the darkness. It was easier now that he had time to adjust to the shadows. When their gazes met, Dazai was somewhat relieved to see that Blaise didn’t look especially worried or hurt. Content for the time being, Dazai turned his attention to the room around them. The ceiling stretched upwards for a long distance and was bordered by the ladder they had taken down. Fred and George were mostly to the bottom now, but seemed to be taking their remaining steps carefully. Good.

But that wasn’t the interesting part. No—what caught Dazai’s attention most was the floor. The simple fact being: there *wasn’t* one.

Instead of tile or wood, the ground was one giant, writhing mass.

Dazai blinked at it—at the twisting body of vines as they snaked around him, withered, and died. As he watched, the floor below Dazai was quickly breaking apart. Instead, the vines were rushing over to Blaise, wrapping around him or tugging at his cloak. When Blaise jerked against it, the vines only strangled him further.

Dazia’s brain pounded into sharp focus and he realized abruptly what was happening.

“It’s Devil’s Snare,” he said, wincing when No Longer Human killed a wayward vine, “The floor is made of Devil’s Snare.”

This must have been Professor Sprout’s guard: a plant that strangled anything that struggled against it. And No Longer Human was going to kill the plant before he could save Blaise, Fred, and George from it. Even as the thought was just crossing his mind, a mass of Devil’s Snare crumpled into dust below his hand. Dazai sunk a foot lower.

“Sounds—” Blaise’s voice abruptly cut off, his hands clawing off a choking vine, “—familiar.”

“It should.” Dazai said. He kept his words perfectly calm, despite the situation. If there was one magical plant that Dazai could tell you everything about, it was Devil's Snare. It had genuinely been the only written assignment he did all year. Dazai could still recite his whole essay off-hand, if necessary. Looking at their situation... maybe that wasn’t such a bad idea. It looked like something good might come out of Professor Sprout’s horrible advice, after all. “This is an easy one. Just don’t—!”

All at once, the last of the Devil’s Snare holding Dazai up died and gave way. The floor below him disappeared, and Dazai was falling again.

He just barely heard the twins scream his name before the roar of wind smothered it whole.

Dazai crashed to the ground a second later. A gasp of pained air escaped his lungs at the collision—this time the floor was solid stone. Nothing felt broken, but Dazai’s body ached

and stung regardless.

Propping an arm below himself, Dazai slowly levered his body into a sitting position. Even as he worked carefully, his bones protested every slight movement. He was certain his body would be black-and-blue by the end of the day. But Dazai didn't have the time to lie around and moan. Looking up, he searched for any sign of Fred, George, or Blaise falling down. Instead, all Dazai saw was the remaining Devil's Snare weaving itself back together into a writhing, deadly ceiling.

"Shit..." Dazai muttered.

What were the odds Blaise or the twins knew about Devil's Snare? Knew that as long as they didn't struggle, the vines would go limp? No Longer Human may have helped *Dazai* escape, but it would do nothing to help his gang follow.

Dazai shook his head, hauling himself into standing. He could still hear the echo of the twins as the Devil's Snare dropped him down. That had been real fear in their shouts—which meant they didn't remember the first year Herbology lesson, either.

Looking around the chamber, Dazai tried to concoct a plan quickly. On closer inspection, the walls were pulsing with vines and roots that had spread from the main mass overhead. No Longer Human ached to nullify it, but Dazai hesitated. Assuming touching the roots would kill the whole plant, Dazai ran the risk of knocking himself out. He didn't need a repeat of the troll fiasco now. Not when they were in the middle of a heist.

Something else then, maybe...

Dazai ran through his essay mentally, his eyes flicking around the room for something else. What else was it that subdued Devil's Snare..?

Light, he thought, *Devil's Snare will withdraw in the light.*

There wasn't anything in the room to spark a light with, though, and the swath of vines overhead continued to writhe and strangle. Blaise and the twins weren't coming down. Dazai needed to do something—fast.

Knock himself out nullifying the plant, or knock himself out with lumos. Nothing was ever simple with his *condition,* was it?

Steeling himself, Dazai decided.

Reaching out with spread fingers, Dazai placed his palm against a massive root of Devil's Snare. It wasn't a hard decision, in the end: No Longer Human or lumos. One was a familiar evil, and the other was...

Well, Dazai never actually learned how to cast lumos. Knowing how difficult magic was for him, Dazai didn't think *guessing* would be very practical at this point. And just the idea of casting incendio now turned Dazai's stomach in knots.

His palm pressed into the Devil's Snare root, Dazai felt No Longer Human spring into destructive action. The reaction was instantaneous. Below his palm, the plant seized. Hand thrumming with loose energy, No Longer Human burnt through the Devil Snare's magical energy. Dazai knew the very second the rest of the plant began to die—a spike of pain stole his breathe away. Pushing his weight into the root, Dazai didn't relent until he heard the *thunk* of a massive vine falling to the floor.

A second later, three more *thunks* smashed to the ground behind Dazai. Only when he heard Fred's, "*Ouch,"* did Dazai drop his hand from the root to his side.

Thinking quickly, the mafioso withdrew his wand from his cloak. He twirled it between two fingers and frowned through his headache.

"Are you two okay?" George asked, voice tense with pain. Dazai watched as he pulled himself upright and shrugged a thick vine off his chest. "Fred, Blaise?"

Beside George, Blaise also sat up. He had a hand pressed to his side like he was kneading out a muscle. Probably bruised, Dazai thought with a painful twinge of his own. "I'm getting real sick of falling."

"At least you had vines to land on," Dazai cut in, feigning amusement as he finally crossed the room to meet his companions. He offered a hand to Blaise.

At once, their eyes shot to him. Dazai saw visible relief in the twins' eyes. Blaise let out a breath and took Dazai's outstretched hand. "You're okay," he confirmed.

"Sure." Dazai hummed, flicking a dead vine off Blaise's shoulder once the other Slytherin was on his feet, "Took you lot long enough."

Blaise rolled his eyes, but the twins spoke before he could respond.

"Kid!" Fred called. He hurried to stand, then ran to Dazai's side.

George wasn't far behind. "You just disappeared! Are you okay?"

"I'm," Dazai took a step back. He willed himself not to flinch, despite the pounding in his skull. "Fine. Are *you* okay? The Devil's Snare didn't strangle any of you, did it?"

It definitely had. There were dark, telling marks wrapping around their arms and necks, and Blaise's voice was a little raspy. As if noticing Dazai's searching eyes, Blaise brought a self-conscious hand to his neck.

"Not for long." The Weasley twins said with a shrug. They were grinning, and Dazai wondered if Fred and George didn't enjoy the thrill of danger just a little bit. Dazai couldn't help but to agree with that sentiment. Standing of the brink of death, just seconds away from his final resting place—!

Something told him they probably wouldn't agree on that part.

"So?" Fred said, picking a leaf from his brother's hair, "What did you do, Snakey?"

Dazai blinked. “Hm?”

Blaise gave him a weird look. When Dazai turned his focus back to the twins, he saw that their excitement was mixed with confusion now. At least they weren’t concerned anymore—Dazai was getting better at hiding when he had a violent, ability-induced headache.

“How did you stop the plant from wrapping us up?” He reiterated after a second. “We jumped down to rip it off of Blaise, but it only pulled us in, too!”

“Right! How come it just let you go like that?”

Dazai looked at each of them in turn, taking in the expressions one at a time. Then, flicking his wand around halfheartedly, he lied, “Devil’s Snare can’t attack in the light. I didn’t think any of you would remember that and cast lumos, so I did it for you.”

George’s mouth dropped into a perfect *O.*

“That’s why it was so dark up there!”

Dazai shrugged. Quietly, he slipped his wand back under his cloak. When he looked up, Blaise was watching him with a thoughtful frown.

“We’ve never practiced lumos,” He said, voice contemplative. Shaking his head, Blaise asked, “Are you feeling sick?”

Dazai waved him off. “Only a little.” And it was true, even if he *was* sick for a different reason than Blaise was led to believe. Dazai’s head ached in point. “Anyway,” He said after a brief staring contest between himself and Blaise, “The Devil’s Snare would have stopped attacking as long as you didn’t struggle against it. So really, this,” here, he gestured to a darkening bruise on Fred’s face, “is kind of your own fault.”

However, instead of joking back, like Dazai expected, Fred’s expression steeled. Beside him, George did the same.

“Are you trying to deflect the conversation?” Fred asked.

“I think he is!” George tutted, “Don’t think we forgot about earlier with that three-headed dog! You aren’t feeling well!”

"Right! We're taking that break now."

Dazai opened his mouth to protest, but Blaise was quick to jump on the Berating Dazai Bandwagon.

“If we aren’t taking a break for *you,* then take a break for me, Boss. My back hurts.” As if to prove his point, Blaise rubbed at a sore spot on his shoulder.

Dazai’s own bruised body was arguing for a break as well.

Letting out a long breath, Dazai relented. “Alright. But just a short one.” Saying this, Dazai let himself lean up against the wall. Begrudgingly, he realized, even that simple act was enough to help the painful beating in his chest. Now, as long as they didn’t talk about what happened with that three-headed monstrosity—

“Are you afraid of dogs, by chance?” Fred asked, resting his back on the wall with a pained grunt.

Just his luck.

Dazai felt his cheeks heat up, and he turned to face the other wall. A dead root hung there, limp. “No.” Then, at Fred’s disbelieving look, he explained, “I just don’t like them. Dogs are stupid and ugly and you should hate them too.” Dazai’s eyes narrowed, and he stared down the twins as if daring them to say something. He was still the boss here. Could still take them apart in less than a second. Could change his plan from “good spirits” to “fear for your life” if they said anything he didn’t want to hear. Father could be like that sometimes—changeable.

Dazai wasn't sure whether his expression said "don't undermine me," or "I don't want to talk about it."

Either way, Fred and George shared a look. They seemed to be debating something telepathically. Finally, George extended an olive branch, “Don’t you call Ron your dog?”

Dazai blinked. The tension in his shoulders melted a little at the obvious escape route. “Sometimes.” He hummed. “He’s the good kind of dog, you know.”

Loyal and not a mindless beast, Dazai thought with a frown.

“You three are my dogs, too,” He added as an afterthought.

“The good kind?”

Dazai looked between them, to the dead Devil’s Snare on the floor, to the closed door beside him leading further into the depths of Hogwarts. He grinned.

“Of course.”

By the time everyone had stopped whining out their sore bodies, Dazai was feeling too tense to stand around much longer. He took one look at Blaise’s pain-pinched brows, and declared, “Let’s get moving. We won’t be able to sneak back out of here if it’s daytime.”

Well... they probably *could* —Dazai had all sorts of tricks up his sleeves at all times. But that was beside the point. Anyway, fewer risks now meant fewer problems later with Quirrell.

Silently, Dazai touched a hand to his chest. Below his palm, the soft weight of a silk bag reminded him of his objective.

Fred and George both straightened up from where they were stretching near the wall. They met each other's eyes, then turned to Blaise. The Slytherin shrugged.

“Sounds good, Boss,” George said after a second.

“I think we’re all mostly recovered from the last two trials now.” Fred agreed. He kept a pointed gaze on Dazai, as if to imply some lasting concern.

Dazai nodded, smiling sedately as the twins and Blaise crossed the room to stand at his side. He still had a pounding headache from killing the Devil’s Snare. However, they didn’t have enough time to let No Longer Human rest—not unless his gang was willing to wait around for a few days in this moldy, stale pit. Dazai tried to cover up the lingering weakness with a blank grin.

But with how the twins had framed themselves at his side, Dazai didn’t think his sickness had quite slipped everyone’s notice.

Shrugging them off, Dazai asked, “Do we have any idea what the remaining guards are?”

Fred and George hummed, sharing a brief, nonplussed look.

“There are four more,” Fred informed him after a second, “One for each of the core professors. Minus History of Magic.”

“Charms, Transfiguration, Defense Against the Dark Arts, and Potions.” George listed off his fingers.

“Any clue what they are?” Blaise asked, sounding more hesitant that his voice normally allowed. Dazai understood the sentiment—he didn’t want to walk into another dog—that was for sure. And honestly, he could do without unknowingly falling down a hole for a *third* time today. His entire body ached at just the thought.

Fred snapped. “As a matter of fact—”

“—we do! Probably.” George finished.

Dazai shuffled out from under the twins in order to more fully meet their eyes. “Well, that sounds promising.” Suddenly, their words caught up with him. Dazai frowned. “Wait. *Quirrell* has a guard down here?”

“We were surprised too! But he definitely got ol’ Dumbledore something to put down here.”

If Dumbledore *really* wanted Quirrell to think it was safe to steal the stone, Dazai supposed that was one way to do it. “It’s probably a mountain troll.” Dazai said haltingly, his brain working overtime to predict their pathing. A furrow pinched between his brows.

“A mountain troll?” Fred asked, “Like on Halloween?”

Blaise answered for him. “You think Professor Quirrell was responsible for that one, as well?”

Dazai shrugged, ignoring the incredulous looks he was getting. “I think Quirrell would have preferred to have gotten the stone much earlier in the year, if he could.” He paused. “I also think that a troll wandering around the school is a great distraction.”

“Professor Quirrell does talk about trolls a lot during class. I guess he studied them while he was on sabbatical,” Blaise explained helpfully.

When it became clear that the twins were deep in thought, Dazai waved their concern off. “It’s just a theory I’ve been working on.” He took a step towards the door. “What's the next guard?”

Fred and George shared a look. Then, seeming to reach a conclusion, they once again returned to Dazai’s side. Dazai let out a huff, but didn’t try to push them off this time. “Professor Flitwick probably made some really complicated charm to keep Quirrell out,” George said. He mimed something with his hands, and it was only a few seconds later that Dazai realized the boy was pretending to ride a broomstick. “And rumor has it, he asked Madam Hooch for some broomsticks!”

“Only Flitwick has never had a class *flying* in Charms, so we thought he must have brought them down here.”

Dazai and Blaise immediately locked eyes. In that moment, they seemed to share the same thought. At the twin’s asking looks, Blaise explained, “Dazai’s never managed to lift his broom off the ground during class.”

The twins snorted. Fred smothered his laughter behind an amused-sounding, “You’re failing Flying too, Snakey?”

“I’m failing everything.”

“So,” Blaise interrupted before that line of questioning could go too far, “the three of us will have to do that one without him.”

George hummed. “Actually, the two of you can take a breather this time.”

“Right!” Fred smirked, “We’re on the Gryffindor quidditch team, y’know! I think we can handle the flying ourselves. Don’t you think, George?”

In response, George merely grinned from ear-to-ear.

Dazai nodded, accepting the help easily enough. His subordinates knew how to do their job—he wasn’t about to protest that. Anyway, Dazai had bigger things to worry about. Namely, if there was a troll in one of next few rooms.

A firm frown had pieced itself on Dazai’s face. His fingers itched with the unwelcome buzz of No Longer Human still.

From a few feet away, Dazai caught Blaise's eyes, pinched into thin contemplation. When Blaise seemed to realize he'd been caught staring, he merely blinked. Dazai turned back to the twins.

"And the other guards?"

Fred and George shrugged. "We couldn't figure out what Professor McGonagall's is. And the only thing Professor Snape has been doing lately is making, like, a *ton* of potions. But that's nothing new."

"Huh." Dazai hummed, leaning back on his heels. It wasn't much information to go off of, but... "Good job, you two."

"Well, you *did* ask us to look into it," George said, and Fred finished, "remember, Snakey?"

Dazai nodded, distracted. He turned his gaze to the next chamber—the next guard—and frowned.

The guards wouldn't be a problem, really. Not with No Longer Human backing the gang up. Charm, beasts, and potions were all rendered equally useless under Dazai's touch. Taking them out was easy enough—it was everything *after* that bothered Dazai.

No, the *problem* was not passing out before he got to the stone. And, more importantly, how was Dazai going to get there without revealing his ability?

Dazai let out a heavy breath, shaking the thoughts before they could become too much. "Well, let's get moving, gang. Those brooms aren't going to fly themselves." He would have a few minutes *at least* while the twins worked out Flitwick's broomstick guard. That was enough time to concoct a sound plan.

Well, Dazai had done more with less in the past.

The twins cheered, following Dazai into the next chamber without complaint. There was a lagging bounce to their steps, now—an eagerness to see this prank through bordered by hesitance. Dazai wondered, briefly, how much of that cheer was performative and how much was genuine amusement.

Blaise came to a slow walk at Dazai's side. "What's next, Boss?"

Looking into Blaise's expression, Dazai tried to discern the emotion there. The other snake turned up a questioning brow.

"Not a clue," Dazai answered, honest. "I'm sure I'll think of something."

Chapter End Notes

i initially wanted to combine chapters 48, 49, and 50 into one longer chapter, but if i did we would immediately run out of buffer chapters. so,,,,, i'm keeping them separate bc i really don't want to have to go on hiatus lol

thanks for reading!

Blaise Considers Getting Dazai a Therapist

Chapter Summary

A Blaise chapter? In my Dazai-centric crossover fic? It's more likely than you think.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Something was off about Dazai, Blaise thought.

Well, more off than normal. After all, there was nothing *usual* about Dazai Osamu on a regular day. The boy was covered head-to-toe in bandages, wore a smile like it was a disguise, and thought deceit was an amusing pastime. There were about a hundred things about Dazai that left Blaise asking, “what’s *really* going on here?” and about a hundred more making him think, “something is severely wrong with this kid.”

But here—right now—something *more* was wrong with Dazai.

For one, Blaise was almost certain his fellow Slytherin had a headache. *Again.* Because Dazai rarely ever *didn’t* have a headache. And as concerning as that was, Blaise had become very accustomed to seeing his friend in constant pain. It hadn’t been until just the other night, outside the infirmary...

(Professor Snape looked between Blaise and Draco, eyes narrowed more in consideration than his usual disdain.

“You are not to practice magic with Mr. Dazai any longer,” Snape had said seriously, “If you see him using magic without a teacher’s guidance, you are to stop him immediately.”

“Is Dazai okay?” Draco had asked then, for what must have been the third time.

The look on Professor Snape’s face had been anywhere from “no” to “I don’t know,” and that stopped them talking faster than any, “what did I say about asking questions,” ever could.)

Blaise shook away the memory by walking up to Dazai and keeping better pace.

He would keep an eye on his friend better now.

So he kept his eyes locked on Dazai as they traveled through the stone hall. A careful, discerning gaze. The type that uncovered someone’s secrets merely by looking. Dazai was a hard nut to crack, but Blaise was patient. Exceptionally so. After all, one couldn’t be friends with Dazai without also having incredible amounts of patience.

It wasn't long before they made it to the end of the hall. Almost immediately, everyone's heads shot up.

The room was massive—a ceiling disappearing somewhere far, far overhead. But the sheer size of the room was hardly what kept Blaise's attention long. No—it was the swarm of keys filling the space up. A hundred—a *thousand* —small, metal keys dashed around the sky. Each key wore a pair of small, fairy's wings that flitted and zipped at a hummingbird's pace. Just when Blaise thought he was tracking the movement of a key, it was half-way across the room the next second.

Blaise opened his mouth to say something, but his eyes caught on Dazai instead. Dazai—who was decidedly *not* watching the impressive flying display overhead. Instead, the other boy was squinting at the far wall. There was a pinch in Dazai's brow like he had an itch he couldn't scratch. When Blaise turned to see what had captured his friend's attention so, he saw a small, unassuming wooden door. On its handle, there was a huge golden lock. Blaise frowned.

"How do we know which key is the right fit?" He asked, looking to Dazai for answers first, then the twins.

A small, silver key danced between them, then disappeared somewhere overhead.

"Dunno," Fred said. "*Ooh!* Here are the brooms! Take a look, George!"

Jerking away from where he'd been watching a particularly large key, George hurried to his brother's side. He shot Blaise and Dazai a reassuring look and a double thumbs-up. "We've got this! Don't worry 'bout a thing!"

"Have a nice sit-down, maybe," Fred chimed in, "Better yet, take a nap!"

Oh. Well. Leave it to the twins, Blaise supposed. It was nice to have such a reliable duo around. *Merlin* knew that if it had been Draco to come with them, his only contribution would have been to brag about his flying skills. Or maybe that was *threaten to sue the school*.

Regardless...

"What do you think, Dazai?"

Blinking out of his thoughts, Dazai whirled away from the door. "Hm?"

Blaise felt his eyes narrow. To his left, he briefly saw the twins mounting their brooms. "About this guard?" He asked, then thought better. "Are you okay?"

Dazai blinked, and Blaise held back a sigh.

"I'm fine. What a weird question." Dazai huffed out after a second. He turned back to the door and tilted his head. Then, for some reason, his face scrunched up. Blaise stared at him for a long moment until Dazai finally explained, "That thing is charmed to all hell and back. I think."

Blaise kept the surprise from appearing on his face. When he turned and squinted at the door, he couldn't sense a thing. He bit his tongue. "Huh."

Letting out a weary breath, Dazai glanced back to Blaise. He offered a sheepish smile. "Guess we'll just have to wait for the twins to find the right key. No amount of Alohomora is going to open that door."

"You don't know how to cast Alohomora."

Dazai shrugged. Then, without another word, he walked to the closest wall and slid down until he was sitting. After a moment, Blaise joined him. He watched as Dazai drew his knees up to his chest and laid his head down there. He just sat there, wrapped up into himself, as if everything in the world was painful. So Dazai's headache *clearly* wasn't on the mend, then.

Blaise sighed and dropped his head back into the stone wall. He watched the twins for a long moment in silence. They were floating a few feet off the ground. Every so often, one of them would point to a flying key and the other would shake his head.

So those two *were* taking this seriously. Good.

At the thought, Blaise cast a surreptitious glance back to Dazai. The other boy was still hunched into himself. With his eyes closed like that, anyone would think that Dazai had taken the twins' advice to nap, but Blaise knew better. He'd spent enough time with Dazai to know when the snake was *actually* resting and when he just wanted to *look* like he was resting.

There was a crease in Dazai's brow, and every so often he would lift his eyes and squint at nothing in particular. No—Dazai wasn't resting at all. He was deep in thought.

And *that* was something else that had been nagging at Blaise for a while—how *quickly* Dazai's perspective had shifted. After winter break, he had been cheerful. Eager to steal the stone and prove to Professor Quirrell who was the better "mafioso." And then—like flipping a switch—he wasn't. Dazai returned from his midnight adventure with Hermione, and suddenly he was making these serious faces all the time. Even after Dazai had filled their gang in on what the stone was, he still couldn't place exactly what had changed Dazai so much.

Blaise had wanted to ask. Had *tried* asking, with his mouth half-open and ready to say, "something about this scares you, doesn't it?" but before Blaise had even gotten one word out, Dazai was making that face again.

Sometimes, Dazai's eyes could go eerily blank, and *that* scared Blaise. They didn't talk about it.

Blaise still hadn't worked up the courage to actually ask, but he did steal Dazai's knife when the boy's dark expressions became darker still. He couldn't regret taking the knife. But now, sitting side-by-side with that morbid expression, Blaise sort of wished he *had* asked.

Fred spotted something overhead. George patted his brother hard on the back, and they both shot into the air grinning.

“Dazai,” Blaise said after a second. His voice was calm and mellow in the same way it always was.

Dazai hummed distractedly.

Blaise watched him with a careful eye—an expert in Dazai’s minuscule expressions. But Dazai held perfectly still like his mind was elsewhere. He took in that empty gaze for a long moment and tried to pick the right words to say.

“You scared me,” was what Blaise finally decided on.

This time, Dazai lifted his head to meet Blaise’s gaze. His brows were pressed together like he was confused. It wasn’t a second later that Dazai replaced that look with one of vague amusement. “Blaise is saying all sorts of strange things today. Should I have left you upstairs to babysit Egg?”

“Isn’t that Ron’s job?” Blaise asked lightly. When Dazai made a sound of acknowledgement, he continued, “Earlier. With—” *the dog* , “—Hagrid’s guard. You scared me.”

The sound of wind chimes—of a thousand clinking keys—echoed around the room.

Blaise bit his tongue when, after a long moment, Dazai had yet to reply. “You’re still bothered by it. Anyone could see that you’re still...”

Panicking. Lost in your head. Worried—when just minutes before you seemed so certain.

Abruptly, Dazai turned away. His gaze briefly lingered on the twins, before falling to the floor. “Ah. Blaise is mean, pointing it out like that.”

“Sorry.” Blaise hummed, letting some warm concern linger on his words.

“Don’t be,” Dazai said. There was an odd inflection in his voice. It took a second for Blaise to pinpoint that emotion. When he did, his heart sank. Dazai craned his neck to beam in Blaise’s direction. A wide, toothy smile split across his features. Sharp, pointed, and—to anyone’s eye—full of genuine happiness. With his eyes pressed closed like that, Dazai’s smile looked honest.

Blaise froze in place, suddenly feeling cold. “That’s fake,” he said, numb.

Dazai hummed and leaned back into his knees. That horrible, brilliant smile of his didn’t falter. “Sure, but you believed it for a second, didn’t you?”

He had. He *had*— and it scared Blaise more than Dazai’s empty gazes ever could.

Dazai held the smile for another long moment, then slipped into a more casual, amused grin. Blaise tried to find where the look went brittle and fake. There was a pit in his stomach when he realized: it didn’t look like a lie *at all.*

Dazai giggled, and Blaise thought, *there. There's the lie.*

“ I don’t like dogs.” Dazai explained, “I told you that.”

When Blaise nodded, the boy continued, “I didn’t realize it would bother me that much. I don’t know why I’m still letting that *thing* hang around in my brain like this.” Dazai paused, like every word he chose was a war, “So don’t fuss over it. I’ll get over myself eventually.”

“That’s...” Blaise blinked. *Concerning*, he wanted to say, but didn’t. Dazai must have seen it on his face anyway, because his grin stretched a little wider. More frantic. Blaise took a silent breath.

“Stupid.” Dazai finished for him.

“I was going to say *an interesting perspective,* but okay.” Blaise huffed. He turned a serious eye onto where Dazai’s nails were digging into the skin of his wrist. “Dazai. I don’t think being afraid of dogs is something you should be ashamed of. Everyone has fears.”

“I’m not ashamed.”

Blaise raised a brow.

Dazai let out an annoyed breath.

“Pretending you aren’t scared seems like a bad idea, in the long run. You’re living in denial, if you want to keep acting like you don’t have emotions,” Blaise said. He paused. “I won’t ask you to tell me why you hate dogs so much. But... you know it’s normal to not immediately recover from something like that, right? You always push yourself too hard, Boss.”

Dazai blinked at him, long and slow like Blaise’s words were a foreign concept. Finally, Dazai let his mockery of a smile collapse. He bent forward, hiding his face in the bend of his knees.

Blaise tried not to let his sigh of relief be too obvious.

They sat like that for a moment. Blaise let his words hang in the air—mingling with the flutter of wings and the rattle of keys. The twins were soaring together overhead. Every few seconds, they would split apart as if they were herding something. The keys flashed around—a murmuration of steel.

Muffled below cloth, Blaise barely caught Dazai’s words when the boy at last spoke up.

“*Gross.”*

Blaise snorted. “Feelings aren’t *gross*, Dazai.”

“Are too!” Dazai whined, petulant. “I don’t like them *at all,* and if Blaise was nicer, he would agree with me!”

Blaise let a small, fond smile slip onto his face.

Dazai picked his head off of his knees. When he saw the expression on Blaise's face, his nose scrunched up into an exaggerated pout. "Stop that."

"Looking at you?"

"Making that face!" Dazai hissed, "You're making a face like you have *feelings.* Even though we just agreed that feelings are gross. Try looking apathetic again. You used to be really good at that."

"Well," Blaise said, amused, "You bring out the worst in me, I suppose."

Dazai smiled thinly, and his fingers worked at the peeling flesh by his nails. "Nothing new there."

Blaise frowned, feeling like he'd mis-stepped somewhere. But before he could backtrack the conversation, Dazai was pushing it elsewhere.

"For the mountain troll—we're going to just have to run past it. Unless you were keen on fighting it."

"Not particularly." Blaise said with a resigned sigh, "I guess we can't rely on your accidental magic again, can we?"

Dazai made an amused sound. "Not unless you want to *carry me* through the other guards. I already have a headache, so anything big like that will knock me out." He admitted with a coy grin.

Professor Snape's voice echoed in Blaise's head again, and the objection was on his tongue before he even considered an alternative.

"Absolutely not."

"That's what I thought."

Nodding, Blaise considered their options. After taking a second to think, he asked, "Running, huh? Are trolls fast?"

"Sort of. They have long legs." Dazai blinked out at the twins. He wore a thoughtful frown, and Blaise couldn't help but wonder if the other boy was remembering his last experience with a troll. Whatever had happened on that night between himself, a mountain troll, and a frankly horrifying display of accidental magic.

Remembering that day... it still put a sick feeling in Blaise's stomach. When Dazai came stumbling into the library with blood running over his mouth, held upright only by Draco's support, it had completely thrown him. On that day, and on many days since then, Blaise had thought, *something is wrong with Dazai.*

Halloween was just another of those *things* that kept Blaise thinking, "when is someone going to talk about that? Nothing about this is normal!" But no one ever did, because Dazai's smiles were distracting even when they weren't especially convincing. Looking at him now...

Something flickered in Dazai's eyes, and a sharp grin suddenly worked its way onto his features.

Blaise sat up straighter. "You just had an idea." He paused. "Should I be worried?"

"Not this time." Dazai said easily. Laying his head back down on his knees, he watched over the twins with half-lidded eyes. He hummed. "Are those two good at flying? I can't tell."

Fred and George swerved around a cluster of keys. A swarm of keys was chasing after them, trying to batter the brooms from their grips. But the twins didn't seem to care. If anything, they looked to be having fun. Blaise watched as Fred, laughing, did an impressive spin on his broom to smack a dozen keys out of the air.

"They made the Gryffindor quidditch team as beaters," Blaise said by way of answer. Tryouts were rough, he knew, because almost every student at Hogwarts wanted a place in their house's quidditch team. That both the twins made the team was telling enough. "I've been to a few of their games," he added in response to Dazai's nonplussed look, "They're pretty good."

By necessity, Blaise skipped most of the quidditch matches. One way or another, keeping track of Dazai had always taken precedence. And Dazai, for his part, seemed to have taken zero interest in the broom-sport.

Maybe that was for the best. After all, the games tended to be a loud, energetic affair and Dazai could barely tolerate a crowded Great Hall.

Dazai tilted his head in acknowledgment.

As they watched, the twins flew around the cavernous room. Even though the swarm of keys was chasing them down, Fred and George were flipping and twirling like it was all some game to them. Again, Fred split off for a split second to bash the back of his broom into some of the keys. They clattered onto the stone floor noisily, but didn't get back up. Now that Blaise was really looking at them (and not at Dazai), he realized that almost all of the flying keys were rendered useless on the floor—the charm literally *beaten* out of then.

"*Oh."* Blaise made a small noise, impressed. When Dazai turned to him, a look of confusion behind his ever-dark eyes, Blaise explained. "In quidditch, the beaters are the ones who bat the bludgers—big cannonball-looking things—away from the other players. Fred and George don't have a bat, but they're pretty nifty with the brush of their brooms."

In point, Blaise gestured to George. The twin flipped upside down and used his broom hit another dozen keys to the floor.

Dazai *oohed*. Then, almost laughingly, he commented, "I didn't realize quidditch was such a violent game."

"Sometimes." Blaise lifted his chin. "But the beaters are good at their job. People don't usually get hit."

"*Usually...*"

Blaise shrugged, hiding his own amusement by tuning his gaze back to the twins.

"Damn!" Dazai snapped his head back, pouting against the stone wall. "I can't believe I've been missing out on a blood sport all this time."

"It's not a blood sport."

"Hey, has anyone gotten knocked off their broom since the school year started?"

Blaise rolled his eyes. "No."

"Well, at least I haven't missed anything exciting then."

Mimicking Dazai's relaxed posture, Blaise rolled his head against the wall to blink down at the shorter Slytherin. Carefully, he said, "There are still a few games left this year. And I hear the championship match is always especially intense."

Dazai perked up. "Really?!"

"Mhm."

For a second, Dazai didn't say anything at all. Then, grinning cheekily, he turned back to the twins. There were only five keys left now. "Hey, after we get the stone, I think I'll go to a game."

Blaise blinked. There was something warm and fond bubbling up in his chest. "I'll save us a quiet seat near the professors, then."

"And we can make bets on who gets the most blood on their broom!"

"Sure." Blaise let out an amused breath. He really couldn't say no to Dazai, could he? "As long as the professors don't hear."

Dazai waved him off. "Nah. I'll get them to place bets, too. I'm pretty convincing, you know."

Blaise did know that. After all, Dazai was convincing him right now—tricking him into forgetting about their earlier conversation. But that was fine with Blaise. He didn't need to solve anyone's problems or fix Dazai's broken smiles. As long as they were standing side-by-side in one piece, Blaise was content with that.

"Hey, you two!"

Blaise and Dazai's heads snapped up and away from one another.

Fred and George beamed down at them from their brooms, hovering a few feet off the air. They each wore a few scrapes and scratches. Behind them, dozens of broken and twitching

keys were piled together. Blaise felt his eyes narrow—Fred and George were looking oddly serious, even with those smiles on.

Maybe they had an important conversation of their own, too.

“Enjoy your break?” George asked. He held up a small, silver key and gave it a little wave.

“You got the right key,” Dazai said, pushing himself upright. “Good job.”

Fred and George preened at the compliment. Without another word, they both lowered their brooms to the ground and held them at their sides.

“What were you guys talking about?” Fred asked, stepping forward to help Blaise to his feet.

Blaise took the offered hand with a grateful bow of his head. Once he was standing, he took a step towards Dazai’s side once again. The bandaged boy grinned.

“Blaise was just saying about how good at flying you both are,” Dazai said, smirking to himself. “I think he’s secretly your biggest fan. Do you give autographs?”

Blaise shot him a deadpan look, but couldn’t ignore the relief in his chest at seeing Dazai cheerful and joking again. It was such a far-cry from the shaken Dazai moments earlier.

Fred and George started laughing, but before they could drag the conversation on longer, Dazai commandeered their focus.

“Well, maybe once we’re done,” He said, shooting a small glance in Blaise’s direction.

“Ooh! Did you get more responsible since we last spoke, Snakey?”

Dazai rolled his eyes. “Something like that. Just put the key in the door already—and bring those broomsticks with you. They might come in handy.”

As a group, they walked over to the door. The massive lock hung there, empty. Even standing this close, Blaise couldn’t tell just what Dazai had seen earlier. He didn’t sense any magic on the door, though surely there was some. It must have just been intuition, then. Dazai *was* smart like that.

“Three down,” Dazai said.

Blaise met his eye. “Three to go.”

George held the key up to the lock, but before he slipped it in, he paused. Slowly, he asked, “Are we ready?”

A series of serious nods answered him. Then, with a steady hand, George inserted the key.

Click.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting! yall are the best!!
sorry this chapter is so short lol i've been struggling a lot with writing lately,,

see yall next week!!

King's Gambit

Chapter Summary

Dazai is really good at chess (the writer of this fic is not).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The room opened up before them. It was another massive, stone room, although this one was significantly less towering than the key room had been. Dazai skimmed his eyes around the space, looking for an immediate threat. He didn't find a troll, which was a relief. But he did see—

“Huh.”

At his side, Blaise twitched. When Dazai turned to him, the other boy was wearing an amused-looking smirk. Dazai had to agree, so he let a tiny laugh bubble up in his chest.

Spread out before them was a super-sized chess board. Black and white tiles lined the floor, filled up with their usual set of players. They stood three-times Dazai’s height and twice as wide. Each piece stood tall—their features stern and stone.

The gang came to a halt just before reaching the board. Dazai stared up at the black backs of the pieces. The king—which was so familiar a touch under his fingers—was now a towering, conniving figure. Its stone fingers were woven together in a look that reminded Dazai too much of a scheming Mori. He looked away quickly. Beside it, the bishop held a scepter thin and black. The knights rode on their rioting horses, the castle stood in rigid defense, and the pawns hunched in loyal servitude. To see it all spread out before him, Dazai couldn’t help but feel a thrill of eager.

Although...

His eyes narrowed.

“Chess?” The twins asked, breaking Dazai from his observations. “We have to win a game of giant chess?”

Blaise and Dazai met one another’s knowing eyes once again.

“Looks like it.” Blaise said, taking a tentative step towards the board. Dazai hummed, lowly, until Blaise stopped walking and turned back to him.

“This one must be Professor McGonagall’s guard!” George piped up. He was looking at the pieces with a searching look in his eyes. “I don’t see any potions around, at least.”

Dazai nodded, then tilted his head back. He had thought it before, and he still thought it now: Quirrell would make a horrible chess player. There was no way this was his guard. Which really only left McGonagall. Dazai didn’t have a hard time believing that. The transfiguration professor had always struck Dazai as someone who was clever enough to play a mean game of chess. She also had incredibly high standards that were strict and unflinching in class—well, discounting Dazai. Ever since the night of the dragon, she’d been just as careful with him as everyone else had become.

Regardless, Dazai thought, “This won’t just be a simple match. If Professor McGonagall made her guard a chess game, she must be good. We’ll be up against a tough opponent.”

“As good as you?” Blaise asked after a second. There was a trill of light amusement in his tone, and Dazai felt his lips twitch upwards in response. The two of them had shared no small amount of chess games together, and not *once* had Blaise managed a win against Dazai.

“You wound me!” Dazai fake-whined, “You know I’m unbeatable, Blaise!”

Except against Mori. But Mori was...

Different. Because Mori always played white and held a scalpel-sharp smile behind crisscrossed fingers.

“Anyway,” Dazai said haltingly, eager to distract those thoughts, “this game might be a little different than we’re used to.” He didn’t wait for a reply before motioning to the massive tile floor before them. “See? Two of the spaces are empty.”

It was glaringly obvious—something that had peaked Dazai’s interest immediately after seeing the board. Where a black bishop should had stood, there was an empty tile. Further down the board, a similarly empty spot singled out a missing castle.

The twins, blinking, looked the board over. “They *are* missing!”

“Are we supposed to win without them?”

Blaise hummed. Even before the boy spoke, Dazai predicted his next question:

“Dazai, what do you think?”

There it was.

Dazai frowned, thoughtful. Blaise was making a habit of asking for his boss’ advice—and Dazai couldn’t say he hated it. It was a familiar role, at least. Looking to your betters to know what to do...

Yes. Dazai was very familiar with that. Something pierced through Dazai’s chest at the thought, and he turned back to the board quickly. Squinting, No Longer Human burned in the base of Dazai’s skull. He let out a breath.

“I think...” Dazai forced some good cheer into his voice, “Are you up for a game, Blaise?”

When they all turned to face him (no small amount of interest in their eyes), Dazai continued, “Two places empty for two players. Hm... you strike me as a castle, so I’ll take the bishop!”

One by one, their eyes flashed from Dazai, to the board, then back. Blaise was the one to speak first—something like realization alight in his eyes.

“*We’re* the pieces?”

“Mhm!” Dazai beamed, rolling back on his heels.

He couldn’t help it—he was feeling a little excited again. If not by chance, then by force. The smile on his face was pulled tight at the edges. Earlier, with the dog... then Blaise’s serious eyes, staring him down with blatant, drowning concern...

Dazai was good at avoiding conversations like that. He would smile and tell a joke, then get away before the conversation took a too serious turn. But lately he’d been slipping. Maybe Hogwarts was making him soft. Between Pomfrey, Snape, the twins, and Blaise, Dazai was surrounded by people who just wouldn’t stop *fussing over him.* It was so viscerally different from life at the Port Mafia, that Dazai was still somehow caught off guard every single time.

Worst of all, he almost *didn’t hate it.*

Knowing that Blaise had his back even when Dazai was panicking about something stupid like a dog made him feel (and did it ever *hurt* to think this) safe.

So, settling a grin over his face, Dazai resolved to suck it up and finish these guards. He didn’t have *time* to be fawned over, despite Blaise’s near constant glances. More than that—he couldn’t be productive if he was off his game. And if Blaise could read through his dead smile that easily, Dazai was *certainly* off his game.

But chess—Dazai could do chess. After all, chess *was* his game.

Avoid Professor Snape. Hatch a dragon’s egg. Steal the stone.

Check, check, almost-check. Two of three done. Dazai needed to stay out of his head and finish this! And who better to do this with than his loyal second-in-command?

Dazai turned an almost smile onto Blaise, “Play with me?”

Blaise blinked. Then, a slight grin split across his face. “On the same side? I may finally have a chance at winning.”

Dazai snorted.

From where they were standing, the twins looked amused as well. Fred leaned over to rest his arm on George’s shoulder casually. They shared matching smirks.

“Aw, looks like we’ll be sitting this one out, George!”

“Our baby brother is all grown up!”

Dazai shot them a look, but it didn’t feel at all scathing. Nodding to himself, Dazai told them, “Why don’t you two sit down somewhere. Take a nap.” When they laughed, he added in a more serious voice, “But stay away from the board. I’m fairly sure you’ll get hurt.”

Abruptly, the twins stopped laughing. Fred shot a nasty side-eye at the chess pieces, but even the pawns didn’t quake under his glare. “Are *you two* going to be safe?” He asked after a second.

“Sure,” Dazai waved them off, glancing to the board himself. Sure enough, the pieces were absolutely *full* of magic. Even more than the charmed door in the last room had been. Just being near the chess board had Dazai’s head aching worse. His eyes flicked briefly to the pawns—hunched into themselves and wielding two stone swords each. Dazai was almost sure of it... “Because *I* know how to play chess. You’ll just get yourselves stabbed.”

Really—this was just playing chess. And Dazai was exceptionally well practiced in chess. Except, in addition to the king, if you lose the castle or the bishop, you *also* lose. With a sigh, Dazai thought, *worst case scenario, I destroy the board itself.* No Longer Human was already itching to do as much. But if Dazai could spare himself from passing out, he would.

Looking between the twins, they still didn’t look convinced. It was that horrible, unending concern leaking out from behind their eyes. And no trivial amount of uncertainty.

Dazai pouted in mock-hurt. “You don’t trust me to win! And to think I believed you were loyal subordinates.”

“Ah,” George said, taking a conscious step back, “It’s not that, Snakey!”

Fred nodded insistently. “We’re just worried! These pieces were made to keep Quirrell out—if one of you gets hurt—”

“We won’t,” Dazai assured them. Then, if only to get them to settle down, he added, “I *know* chess. Trust me—as your boss.” He paused. “Or, if it helps, you can trust me as a friend. Or whatever.”

The twins shared one of their looks. Then, with a final glance to Blaise (who merely shrugged, a type of agreeable tilt to his lips), they grinned.

“Of course we trust our boss!”

“But the whole gang falls apart if you’re too hurt to lead us!” Fred nodded. “So we’re only a little over-protective.”

Agreeable as ever, George hummed, “It’s a big brother thing.”

Dazai rolled his eyes, then waved them off. “Alright, that’s enough. Go sit down. Blaise and I have work to do, so save your fussing for *after* we win the game.”

“And get the stone,” Blaise added.

And get the stone— because even chess was worthless if there wasn't an end goal. Whether that was playing along with Mori's whims, dominating his subordinates mentally, or stealing an immortality-granting stone, there was always *something.*

*"*Alright!" Dazai said, clapping his hands. Across the room, Fred and George were settling in against the stone wall—finally. They looked stiff and uncomfortable. He would have to make this fast. Twirling on his feet, Dazai grinned to Blaise. "Take the castle's spot. I'll play the bishop, since I'm the brains of this operation."

Blaise shot him a nonplussed look, but took a step towards the blank space regardless. "That has nothing to do with being the bishop. At least pick a believable reason."

Dazai shrugged.

Because Blaise was a foot ahead of him, the other boy was the first to step onto the massive chess board. Dazai watched, eyes narrowed and breath stilled, as Blaise crossed the threshold. He waited with muscles tense for something to happen—for the magicked pieces to slay Blaise in place. Only, after a few more steps, the chess pieces didn't even twitch. They remained as still as stone long enough for Blaise to come to a stop in the empty black castle's domain. He tapped his heel against the blank, white tile, and Dazai let out sigh.

With a nod to Blaise, Dazai continued across the board. His feet *clicked* on the cold tile, echoing around the room quietly. The second Dazai touched the board, he felt the magic ten-fold. If it hadn't been obvious before, it was now—this chess set was overflowing with magic. As Dazai walked past the towering queen and king, he was careful to avoid touching them. He was already limited in his use of the one bishop and castle. Nullifying any other pieces was too much of a handicap.

Before Dazai reached the bishop's empty, black square, Dazai turned to face the white pieces. They were just as massive and oppressive as their black counterparts were. Dazai could feel how their magic ached to move across the board almost as much as No Longer Human ached to dry them out.

Dazai took a slow step toward a white pawn. His eyes narrowed, intent on getting a better feel of what charm was powering them. Whatever it was, it was *certainly* more complicated that the twins' charm for making books fly.

However, before Dazai could take another step, the pawn suddenly twitched to life. Dazai jumped back a square just as the stone jolted to attention, drawing dual swords to its sides.

The twins shouted from across the room, but Dazai was quick to reassure them. "I was just checking—it's fine."

Sure enough, when Dazai returned to the black side of the board, the pawn returned to its resting state. Dazai glanced over his shoulder to see Fred and George half-way to standing back up. He placated them with an easy smile.

"But it does look dangerous..." Dazai hummed. He turned to Blaise. "We'll have to win the game, otherwise they'll cut us up with those swords when we try to pass. I want to play this

really safe." He tilted his head up at the other end of the room, where the next door waited for them. "Let me call the shots."

When Blaise immediately agreed, Dazai let himself fall back into position. The bishop's tile was a clean, black marble. Dazai felt it hum with magic beneath his shoes, and slipped his hands under his cloak self-consciously.

Standing beside the real pieces—the black king and the knight—Dazai was incredibly small. Fragile. He would have to play this game carefully, he knew.

The real question was: how good was McGonagall at chess? Dazai silently berated himself for not taking the time to dissect the transfiguration professor's mind. He'd been more focused on Snape and Quirrell, but that was no excuse.

Dazai met Blaise's eye from across the board while peeking around the king's long shadow. When the other snake grinned, Dazai let himself relax a little.

Then, without warning, a white pawn moved.

It slid forward across the board two paces with the sound of grinding stone to mark its march. Once it reached its destination, the room grew silent once more. Dazai let out a breath.

"You've got this, Boss!"

"Go, Snakey!" Fred cheered. "Go, Blaise!"

Dazai blinked up from the opposing pawn, a thousand battle strategies already buzzing around in his skull. At the wall, the twins were cheering and waving enthusiastically. Dazai wondered if he should scold them for being so blasé, but supposed this was better than the alternative. He spared a brief glance to Blaise, but the other boy only nodded.

"Good luck."

With that, the final bit of tension in Dazai's spine eased out. "I don't need luck," he said, "this is all skill, you know."

It was. Mori wouldn't have anything less. And now, for Blaise and the twins, neither would Dazai.

"E7 to E5," Dazai called to the empty room.

He waited for half-a-second. Then, the pawn guarding his king slowly marched forward until it was nose-to-nose with the forward-bound white pawn. They stared one another down through stone eyes.

Dazai's eyes narrowed, analyzing the board and all his potential moves. Outwardly, he was squinting through the dim light. However, in Dazai's mind the pieces were ten, twenty, thirty moves ahead. Every possible play the enemy could make, Dazai could already foresee. The only thing limiting Dazai's plan was how desperately he needed to keep Blaise's castle and his own bishop tucked away—safe.

The sound of stone-on-stone tore Dazai from his thoughts abruptly. A white pawn snaked across the board to stand beside its brother at F4.

Dazai blinked, furrowed his brow, then blinked again.

A King's Gambit opening. Dazai could work with that. But...

The game unraveled itself in Dazai's mind. Chess was a game of logic, in the end. And with Mori as his teacher, Dazai had learned how to view everything through a purely logical lens. It was the reason why Dazai refused to name his pet and held a strong dislike for the chaotic way Hogwarts was organized. There was absolutely no room for any of that sentimentality or illogicality in chess. Not if you wanted to win.

Unless you're best friend was one of the pieces. In which case...

Dazai took a deep breath, and walked across the board, through the opening his pawn had made, and stopped at C5.

"Dazai!" Blaise hissed from his own stationary position. "What are you doing?"

Dazai hummed, rolling back on his heels. "Playing chess. Probably winning. Why?"

The look Blaise sent him was somewhere near scathing. It was also laced with worry, and Dazai quickly looked away. "What happened to *playing it safe?* You're standing in the middle of the board, Dazai!"

Before Dazai could respond, the white pieces made their counter. A white knight slid across the board before stopping behind one of its pawns.

Ignoring the quiet uncertainties rising up from his gang, Dazai countered almost immediately. "D6."

His pawn moved forward. Shortly after, a white pawn did the same to C3.

Dazai mutely ran through his option again, before finally settling on, "Bishop to G4."

Everything was going smoothly. But it was really only a matter of time before *something* happened. Just as Dazai was considering this, white made its next move.

One of the pawns that had pushed forward turned on its base until it was facing Dazai's pawn. Then, with striking speed, it raised its stone blades into the sky. It slashed downward. There was a thundering *boom* as stone tore into stone. Immediately, the black pawn crumbled, heavy stone smashing onto the board and skidding along the tile. The black pawn collapsed, defeated and utterly destroyed.

A fracture of stone smacked into Dazai's shoe. There was no magic left in the stone—it was dead.

There was a hushed silence. Dazai could envision it—was sure that the others were thinking the same: one of those towering pieces striking him down. Striking *Blaise* down.

“We should stop,” one of the twins called out from the wall. Fred and George were both standing now, looking slightly shaken on their feet. A fracture of the broken pawn skittered to a stop at their feet. “I knew it. This is too dangerous.”

“More dangerous than that stupid dog?” Dazai asked, frowning. “Or the plant that tried to suffocate you?” He kicked the stone away with a small frown.

George shook his head. “We didn’t *know* about those ones. It’s not too late to stop.”

“We all just saw what happened to that pawn! That could be one of you!”

Dazai closed his eyes in thought. The near-frantic voices of the twins washed over him, but they didn’t move to the board, too cautious about being slain themselves.

“We’re always telling you to take care of yourself—” George tried.

“Or practice self-control,” Blaise added.

“—this is one of those times when you should *really* listen to us.”

“I’m not just going to watch you get yourself seriously hurt. Or...”

“Pawn take on E5,” Dazai said instead.

He opened his eyes to a suddenly near-silent room. As Dazai's own black pawn slowly raised its blades, Fred warned, “ *Dazai...”*

“ You all worry too much.” He huffed out a breath, pointedly ignoring the tight, betrayed feeling bubbling in his chest. “I can win this.”

As he spoke, the opposing white pawn was torn to pieces. There was a loud clatter of stone shattering, followed by a heavy silence.

“This is too dangerous!” George cut in. His voice was a far cry from the usual levity it carried. "If one of them gets *you—"*

"That won't happen." Dazai turned away to watch the white queen push across the board. It shoved aside the broken pawn’s head on its path and came to a stop four spaces in front of Blaise. It couldn’t take him, of course. Dazai was purposefully keeping the right castle—*Blaise—* guarded on all sides. The pawn protecting Blaise stared down the white queen and Dazai, stood open in the middle of the board, defended that pawn.

It wasn’t *that precarious* . But, Dazai supposed, he could understand their worry. There *were* chunks of broken pawn scattered all across the board, after all. Bone could break just as easily.

“Trust me,” Dazai said, calling forth the knight beside Blaise with a passive command. It left Blaise’s side, but didn’t leave him undefended.

Dazai could see their worry—could see how they wanted him to get off the board before the opponent made a move he couldn't counter. But Dazai knew with all his cold, logical brain, that he could win this.

A white knight rode across the board, then crushed a black pawn under its hooves. Dazai paid it no mind, sending up a knight of his own to pressure one of white's pawns.

At the wall, the twins didn't settle back down, but they did hold their tongues now. They watched with wide eyes as another white pawn pushed across the board.

It came to rest one spot diagonal to Dazai.

Dazai blinked up at the pawn. From his position, *pawn* wasn't quite the right word. It towered over him, a massive stone man wielding dual swords. Behind him, Fred, George, and Blaise all drew in joint breaths. In one turn, Dazai could be taken out. But...

"Dazai—"

"You worry too much." He sniped back. "If that pawn kills me here, Blaise will just take the queen. It's an illogical trade and white won't take it. It's fine."

And it *was.* He tried to project as much certainty into his voice, but irritation won out in the end. Fred and George spent so much time worrying, they didn't even realize Dazai was about to *win.* Quickest game he'd played in a while, honestly. Once they were done with this stone nonsense, Dazai was going to march right up to McGonagall and tell her off for so-called chess skills.

"Sorry, Boss."

Dazai frowned, then whirled on his tile to see Blaise, who was still tucked away behind a line of pawns. "Apology accepted." He hummed. "What did you do?"

"You're right," Blaise said in explanation. "You have absolutely no self-preservation skills, so we worry. A lot."

Unwittingly, that horrible three-headed dog flashed in Dazai's head. He *had* needed their worry then, he supposed. It had carried him from the room and into that (disgustingly reassuring) conversation with Blaise.

Dazai let his eyes narrow a bit at the thought. Felt his skin prickle. Because this was *different.* This was Dazai taking care of them—his gang members.

"But," Blaise continued, "this is important to you, right? So we should trust that you'll do everything you can to win."

Dazai felt his nose scrunch up. Then, pouting, he said, "You should trust me because I'm your boss. But you're not entirely wrong, either."

"Oh." Fred and George said together. Dazai had to crane his neck to see them properly. "We're sorry for doubting you, too. You've really got this under control?"

“Obviously.” He puffed out a breath. “And you’re not sorry at all.”

Fred shrugged, but didn’t disagree.

“It’s a part of being your older brother, Snakey. *Someone’s* got to worry about you!”

Blaise nodded to him, and the twins reluctantly settled back against the wall. Dazai let out a calming breath and castled is king.

The sound of rock scraping against rock calmed Dazai’s thoughts somewhat. At the very least, it kept him from hearing any more declarations of concern from his subordinates. With the king safely hidden in the corner and the non-Blaise rook prepared to attack if necessary, Dazai felt victory edge closer to reality.

It was silent for a long moment. Dazai eyed the pawn's marble blades with no air in his chest. For a second, he did nothing but stare to see if the pawn would move—would strike him down and splatter his blood across the black-and-white tiles.

Instead, a white bishop marched across the board.

Dazai nodded. Behind him, he heard his subordinates let out sighs of relief.

The game was nearly over now. Unknowingly, Professor McGonagall’s magicked chess pieces had just made a horrible, game-ending mistake.

Knight takes on E5. White’s pawn takes back on E5. Knight takes on E4. And—black and white stone shattered all across the tiled floor—queen takes on E4.

Dazai winced back as a shard of stone shot through the air, narrowly slicing his cheek. A small, tear of blood rolled down is chin and splattered against the black tile at his feet. He hummed in the silence.

And it *was* silent. All at once, the pieces had stopped moving. Whatever magic was keeping them alive flickered out and died. Dazai felt it disperse into the air and buzz around quietly. It tickled against his skin and burned at the open cut on his face.

With a nod, Dazai stepped forward.

“Dazai!” George called, panicked.

Dazai whirled on his feet and blinked. “What.”

“You’re—” He gasped, “Wait. Why aren’t they attacking you?”

Amusement bubbled up in Dazai’s chest. After a second, it revealed itself as a light titter. “Because we *won.* Now hurry up.”

“Won!?”

Their footsteps clattered loudly against the tile as the twins raced to cross the board and reach him. Blaise got to Dazai first, an indescribable look on his face.

“Good job, Boss. Not that I’m surprised.”

Dazai raised a brow.

“Maybe a little surprised,” he amended. “You didn’t have to put yourself at risk like that, you know.”

“It wasn’t really a risk. You’d know that if you were any better at chess—!”

Before he could get the last word out, the twins were smothering Dazai between their chests in a hug. Dazai blinked—his mouth dropped open and arms tense at his sides. There was something warm about the way their arms wrapped around him, but the blood of adrenaline was still pounding in Dazai’s chest. It made his skin prickle. It wasn’t even a second before Dazai tried to squirm out of Fred and George’s embrace.

They let him go immediately, and Dazai let out a breath at that. Still, the twins didn’t step away. They hovered right at his side, eyes pressed into an emotion Dazai couldn’t quite decipher. He crossed his arms and watched them.

“You scared us, Snakey!” Fred whined. At his side, George nodded emphatically.

“I told you,” Dazai stated, taking a step towards Blaise, “I was going to win.”

The twins brushed him off immediately. “Doesn’t mean we can’t worry. You could be one-hundred percent certain, and we’d still be concerned when you're walking right into danger like that.”

Dazai frowned, remembering all the times that Fred and George had fussed over him. Mostly, he was thinking about Quirrell. They had tried to stop him from doing things like this in the past, hadn’t they? Still—there was a fine line between a protective subordinate and a controlling one. Dazai bristled at the betraying heat in his cheeks.

“Dazai.”

He turned to see Blaise watching them with a dull expression on his face.

“What?”

“I think,” Blaise said, “you should just accept that people care about you now.”

Dazai felt his whole face scrunch up in displeasure before the words had even registered (... *now?).* *“* Don’t be weird,” he grumbled, feeling warm. “Just congratulate me on being way smarter than Professor McGonagall and let’s move on.”

Fred and George gave Dazai an accommodating pair of smiles.

“Sure, sure,” Fred hummed. “How’d you win, anyway?”

“The white king is trapped,” Dazai explained with a nod. “Or, it would have been in one move. I guess whatever magic was in those pieces knew it was a lost cause. See?” He gestured vaguely to the board. “No matter where the white king goes, I can capture it. Check and mate.”

Scattered around the board, the black bishops and the queen had pinned the King in place. It would only have taken one more move to force defeat. Since the first move, everything had been lined up in Dazai’s favor. Feeling self-satisfied, Dazai smirked in Blaise’s direction. “I told you I was going to play it safe.”

“Absolutely nothing about putting yourself in the middle of the board looked safe.”

“Well,” Dazai shrugged, “by *safe,* I of course meant as quickly as possible. What was that, ten moves? That feels fast.”

“Fast is not safe. It’s risky.”

“You’re a spoilsport, Blaise. We won, didn’t we? Where’s my congratulations, already?” Dazai pouted.

Blaise raised an unamused brow. “You wriggled out of your congratulation hug on like it physically pained you.”

“It did.” Dazai nodded, and the words weren’t *entirely* a lie. Having friends was strange—it was making him soft in all sorts of ways. A mafioso shouldn’t be soft like that, but a good leader should always know when to accept support from one’s subordinates. So...

“Two more trials,” Dazai told them, “Quirrell and Snape... Whatever guards they have, I trust you three will have my back?”

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading! yall are the best!
I don't know anything about chess, so i copied the moves from this video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aJLgFvTs8s
i have no idea what they're saying (sorry) but i did follow the moves as they were pasted in the description.
If you don't know anything about chess, just pretend Dazai did something really impressive. If you know a lot about chess, just pretend you don't.

as a side note, i wrote literally one page this entire week so. thats not great for the only 2 buffer chapters i have left
see yall next week!

The Philosopher's Stone

Chapter Summary

Magic, a mirror, and a secret.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai had the twins grab their stolen brooms before moving onto the next room. Gripped tight and held out, Fred and George could be ready to fly at a moment's notice. A step ahead of him, Blaise's fingers were bent around his wand. There was a spell at the tip of his tongue. And Dazai—

"I still think that I should be the one leading."

Three pairs of unamused looks met him head-on.

"What are you going to do if it's the troll, Dazai?" Blaise asked, bow raised.

Fred nodded. "You can't use a spell on it—"

"Or fly above it," George finished, sounding strangely uneasy. He waved the broom in emphasis. "But *we* can do all of those things. Isn't is safest if you stay in the back?"

Dazai rolled his eyes, but conceded the point. He really *wouldn't* be much help against a troll —not without using No Longer Human, at least. Though it was a bit demeaning to be shoved in the back, at least his subordinates were doing their jobs. This *did* feel a bit like a Boss being escorted by their guards. Dazai tried to focus on that thought and not the more annoying "everyone coddles Dazai because he's useless" one.

Regardless.

"Fine then. Lead the way," Dazai told them, "try not to let me get killed."

He *couldn't* die to a troll, but that was beside the point.

As they walked across the board and to the next door, Dazai let his mind wander. He had faced a troll in the past, unlike the rest of his companions. Unfortunately, no amount of experience or research could really offer advice on how to defeat a mountain troll. *Especially* not for inexperienced eleven- and thirteen-year-olds. *Still*— there had to be a better way to face one down. At least now Dazai could prepare for it. Last time...

Dazai's nose scrunched up in thought. Then, as they reached the door, his nose scrunched up even further for an entirely different reason: *disgust*.

"*Ugh,"* he whined, "I forgot how atrocious mountain trolls smelled."

The stench rankled the air and was so potent it leaked through the shut, wooden door. Around him, Fred, George, and Blaise made similar faces. Their lips reared up and their noses were pinched as the foul odor stole away the otherwise musty air.

Fred coughed, then raised a sleeved hand to cover his nose. Inspired, Dazai moved to do the same. "Well," he choked on the smell, "at least we can be certain the next guard *is* a troll."

"How can Squirrelly Quirrelly stand these things!" George said behind his own cloth, "Maybe the *troll* isn't his guard, and it's just this *awful stench* !"

"I don't know if I can go on! Dear brother, remember me fondly!" Fred cried, voice oddly tight as he slumped over melodramatically.

Blaise nodded, emphatic, and hid his face behind two cupped hands.

"It's only going to get worse once we open the door," Dazai told them offhand.

Beside him, the twins paled. Although there was a certain look in their eyes that...

"What?"

Fred and George blinked sheepishly.

"Ah... you got us. We were just thinking—" Fred started.

George finished, "—we could probably make a stink bomb that smelled like this. Can you imagine the look on Professor Snape's greasy face?"

They laughed, but it was quickly smothered by disgusted, choking coughs. Dazai rolled his eyes, amused by their antics. Only, there was something tense and unsure in their expressions now. Was it the smell..?

Dazai looked between his subordinates as they struggled to withstand the rank odor. It was overwhelming, sure—but unlike the others, Dazai *also* knew what was coming next. The massive, hulking frame of the mountain troll. It's dead, beady eyes. The clawed hands that could crush stone. The...

He was getting distracted. The point was: it had been a *fluke* Dazai defeated the troll last time. Pure luck that No Longer Human could kill the beast before it broke his spine. And now, having to protect both himself and his friends , Dazai would have to do a whole lot more than just *get lucky.*

" Hey," he said suddenly. Once everyone's eyes had turned to him (it was hard to tell, what with how everyone had their faces mostly covered), Dazai continued, "I have a plan."

Something better—*safer*— than simply hoping they would be fast enough to avoid the troll's crushing grip. The sort of plan a leader who was sworn to protect their subordinates would come up with, really.

"Ooh?" George cooed. He promptly stuffed his sleeve into his nostrils. "Do tell, Snakey!" He said, voice nasally.

Blaise hummed. He looked as calm as he always did—well, *mostly* always did. "It's about time. You *always* have a plan, Boss."

"Sure." Dazai grinned behind his sleeve. "Fred, George. Do you two remember the spell you used to charm Professor Quirrell's essays over winter break?"

They perked up, briefly shared a glance, then nodded. "Yup! But why? We can't use that to defeat a troll!"

"Er," George inclined his head, "*can we?"*

" More or less. We're playing it safe," Dazai said with a pointed glance to Blaise. The other boy returned his look with a thoughtful nod of his own. Dazai looked back to the twins before he could fully decipher that expression. "So here's what I need you two to do..."

"Ready..."

Everyone sucked in a breath and held it.

"Set..."

Fred's fingers clenched around both brooms, shaking as they tugged away from him.

"Go!"

Dazai whipped the door open in one swift movement. It creaked and groaned in protest before slamming against the wall. At the very same second, Fred released the brooms. They immediately shot out of his hands and took to the sky, dashing into the troll's room and zooming overhead. The magic in them was bouncy and energizing, Dazai thought. They zipped overhead, but Dazai didn't waste time in tracking their movement.

Just like the smell had indicated, in the center of the wide stone room, a mountain troll was sitting hunched in on itself. This one looked no different than the troll Dazai had killed on Halloween. Just as massive and overwhelmingly *smelly* —

For just a split second, a trill of fear bundled itself up in Dazai's chest. He felt the press of its claws dig into his spine, the stare of its dull-looking eyes bleeding through his soul. The fear

that lingered from Halloween that Dazai had mostly willed himself to forget about stuck his feet to the tile.

Last time, Dazai had been willing to let it kill him.

Blaise's hand pressed up against the small of Dazai's back.

"Let's move," he whispered, low, in Dazai's ear.

The charmed brooms flew just over the troll's head, dancing over its skull and behind its ears. An indescribable look crossed the monster's face. Then, like swatting at a fly, the troll reached out a massive paw to bat the brooms down. When the brooms only zoomed out of its grasp, the troll let out an enraged growl. It reached out again, spinning in circles and swatting at the air as it tried and failed to catch the offending brooms.

Dazai smirked—the mountain troll was completely distracted by the charmed brooms! It hadn't even noticed their presence yet. As long as they were fast—

Blaise gave Dazai a nudge on the shoulder, and the mafioso nodded back.

Then, like snakes through the underbrush, Dazai and his gang snuck around the blustering mountain troll. They hugged the wall. As they slowly crept to the other end of the room, Dazai was careful to keep his steps silent. But it didn't seem like the effort was needed. The mountain troll swatted wildly around its head at the brooms, letting them sneak by completely unnoticed.

When the troll smacked out fruitlessly once more, Dazai couldn't help the smile that slipped onto his face. The last of his worry withered away.

Dazai didn't take his eyes off the troll, but he felt the twins come to a stop beside him.

"The door's locked," George said in a hushed voice, just loud enough for Dazai to catch, "give me a second..."

The troll's meaty claw struck out, bashing against one of the brooms. The broom snapped in two from the blow, then clattered onto the ground in a noisy pile of splinters. Dazai held his breath for a moment, but the troll still didn't turn around to face them. It continued to smack around the air for the second broom.

"*Alohomora."*

There was a spike of magical energy to Dazai's right. He jerked unconsciously away from the stinging sensation.

Across the room, the troll twitched, too.

"Got it! It's unlocked now!"

Dazai blinked, quickly turning to the twins.

Fred and George beamed at him, standing proud by the now unlocked door.

“Great,” Dazai said, giving them a shove, “I’m pretty sure it felt that, too.”

“Felt—?”

“*Too?”*

Dazai didn’t have to turn around, he saw it in the way the twins’ eyes widened. Felt it in the way the air had gone tense. Heard the rumble of a troll’s heavy step.

Having finally noticed their presence, the troll had turned its full attention onto them. It growled, then charged.

“Go!” Dazai shouted at Fred, George, and Blaise. The twins had gone eerily pale, their feet frozen in place. But Dazai’s voice must have shaken them from their stupor.

Not a second later, Fred and George hurried through the door. They stopped just on the other side, hands grasping at the open metal and ready to close it the second everyone was through. Dazai rushed through next, a clamber of thudding steps banging behind him. George put an arm around his shoulders and tugged the mafioso in the last few steps.

Dazai swung around on his heels just in time to see Blaise slip through the door, seconds before the twins slammed it shut on the troll’s face.

The metallic echo rang around the silence for a long moment. Dazai let out a series of heavy breaths, and heard his gang gasping around him.

After a second, when it became clear that the troll would not be able to force the door open, Fred groaned. “This prank involves *way* more peril than I anticipated.”

“Seconded,” George huffed.

Dazai rolled his eyes. Then, forcing his posture upright, he said, “I told you it was probably a mountain troll. What were you expecting?”

The twins waved him off, pouting. “You’re no fair, boss! Back us up, Blaise! We can’t be the only ones thinking this is way too *life-or-death* for a prank.”

Again, Dazai rolled his eyes. He glanced to Blaise, intent on hounding his friend to back him up.

“This *is* probably too dangerous for students,” Blaise started, voice slow and breathy from their unexpected sprint, “But we knew what we were getting into, really. I think the real problem is that Dazai’s idea of *peril* is different from ours.”

“Dazai, buddy,” Fred gaped, “if you don’t think a troll is perilous, I don’t know what to do with you.”

“I *know* trolls are dangerous.” He huffed. But he’d run into *two of them* now. Dazai was starting to get used to the phenomenon, actually. Between the trolls and the dragon, Dazai felt he had plenty of experience with magical creatures trying to kill him. It helped that he had a built-in Get-Out-of-Jail-Free card via No Longer Human. And having loyal subordinates at his back... Dazai shrugged. “If you had objections, you should have brought them up before sneaking down here.”

They bristled defensively, then looked at Dazai like *he* was the crazy one. “We didn’t realize this was a life-or-death operation!”

“What about the plants that tried to kill us!”

“Or those chess pieces!”

“Yeah!” Fred rallied, “And what about that awful three-headed d—”

He cut off abruptly, eyes going wide and flicking away from Dazai almost guiltily.

Something hot and embarrassed burned at the mafioso’s cheeks. “Annoying obstacles,” he said through gritted teeth, pointedly ignoring the soft look Blaise was giving him, “The danger doesn’t outweigh the reward.”

“*Different ideas of peril, is right,”* Fred muttered under his breath. He shared a look with his brother, then addressed Dazai. “Yeah, okay. We are *definitely* having a talk about your risk-taking once this is done. How are you so *calm* about all this?”

Dazai scrunched his nose up. “My Pranks and Chaos division is kind of being a stick-in-the-mud.”

“Starting to realize this barely qualifies as a prank so much as it’s a suicide mission,” George said by way of answer. There was something dark and shaded in his words.

Dazai blinked at that, a frown picking at his lips. Before he could choose which words to say (“this isn’t a suicide mission, trust me, I would know,” or, “it’s not a prank, it’s for Mori,” or even, “*immortality* is at stake—are you even paying attention?”) Blaise cleared his throat.

The other boy was a warm presence at Dazai’s side. When did he get so close?

“We all agreed to take the Philosopher’s Stone, even knowing that the professors were doing all they could to protect it.” He looked between them slowly, eventually stopping on Fred and George. “You two didn’t take it seriously enough,” Blaise turned his eyes onto Dazai, “you knew the risks, but continued anyway. There’s nothing to be done about that now.”

They were quiet for a second. Dazai let the words roll around in his head, wondering if he was supposed to take offense to them.

“What about you, Blaise?”

“I’m just here to babysit.” He frowned. “So I guess that puts me on the same level as Dazai, in terms of reckless involvement. What a sobering thought.”

Definitely supposed to take offense, then.

The twins chuckled, but it felt a bit forced. “We’ll lecture you too then, Blaise.”

When Blaise merely shrugged, Dazai allowed himself to stand taller. Fred and George were still beside one another, looking a mix of uncertain and worried. That expression didn’t look right on their faces. As Boss, he wouldn’t have it.

“A little rebellion is good for the soul,” Fred said hesitantly (exasperated?), “But Dazai, you haven’t once looked surprised that we might actually *die* doing this. Did you...”

Dazai’s eyes narrowed, and he bristled unconsciously. “You can complain about it later.” He looked around the room, scanning the walls for the first time since they had charged in. It helped, a bit, not to have to look the twins in the eyes. They almost looked *angry.* It burned in Dazai’s chest. “I have more important things to do right now.”

This room wasn’t nearly as large as the last few had been. It wasn’t nearly as threatening, either. For one, there was no magical creature barreling down on them. For another...

Well, actually, that was about it. All of the other trials had involved trying not to be killed by a creature or charm. But looking around now, nothing like that was present. Instead, there was on long table in the middle of the room. There were seven bottles on the table, each of a different color and size.

“Looks like this is Snape’s guard,” Dazai told the group before anyone could interrupt him.

Blaise, seeming to catch on to Dazai’s waning mood, followed his gaze to the table without complaint. “Those are potions?”

Dazai nodded. From here, they just looked like oddly shaped bottles, but Dazai could feel the magic thrumming through them. Well... in five of them. Two of the bottles didn’t have a trace of magic energy in them, but the rest tickled under Dazai’s skin from across the room. He rolled his shoulders back in displeasure, trying fruitlessly to shake off the odd sensation.

Without taking his eyes off of the potions, Dazai asked the twins, “You two said Professor Snape was making potions, right? Do you recognize these?”

There was a sigh from behind him, but after a second Fred and George came up from behind him to inspect the bottles close. However, the second that they stepped forward, a wall of flames rose up behind them, covering the troll’s door and blocking their path out. At the same time, black flames burst to life in front of them, preventing the group from moving forward.

“*Woah.”*

Dazai frowned, and met Blaise’s eyes across the short distance. “Guess we have no choice but to move forward now.” That solved the problem of the twins' sudden worry about risk-taking, at least. He looked between them. “Any idea what kind of potions these are?”

Fred leaned over the table, face scrunched up in concentration. If the situation bothered him, he didn’t let it show. The only tell that he was upset was the slight downturn of his lips,

though if it was directed at the fire trapping them or at Dazai, the mafioso couldn't be sure. "Nope!" He said, popping the *p.*

*"*Actually," George cut in, not unkindly, "I might. Take a look at this, Boss."

With a wave of his hand, George grabbed a paper scroll off of the table. Dazai blinked, not having noticed the item before then. As Dazai crossed the room to grab the scroll, George read through it silently. Fred peeked over his brother's shoulder at whatever was written there.

"What is it?" Dazai asked after a second, when they didn't say anything. "Let me see."

The twins shared a brief look—one of the sideways glances that inevitably meant they were being *weird* about him again. To prove the point, George pulled the sheet close to his chest before Dazai could reach out and take it. The brothers eyes him, expression fierce in a protective sort of way.

"You can read it," George said, "but you have to promise first that you aren't going to do something reckless about it."

Dazai felt his eyes twitch, then carefully schooled his expression. "Sure," he said, tasting the lie on his tongue before even registering his options.

Fred rolled his eyes. "You said that awfully fast."

"*Sure,"* Dazai said purposefully slow. "We're trapped in here either way." He motioned to the flames trapping them in. "At least let me take a look."

They stared at one another for a long moment, before George finally relented. Dazai took the scroll before George could change his mind, quickly reading through the paper's written content.

"It's a riddle," Fred told Blaise while he read, "I guess we have to drink one of the potions to move forward, but we have to figure out the right one. Two of the potions are wine—which might be fun to take, even if they won't help us at all. I know a few seventh years who would pay good money for that!"

"One of the potions takes us back a room," George said, "which is worse, considering the angry troll we left behind."

Dazai hummed. He rolled the scroll back up and handed it to Blaise for the other boy to skim. "Only one of these takes us forward. The other three are poison."

Poison. Dazai shifted on his feet, itching to make some remark about suicide. Judging by Blaise's raised brow, the other boy expected one. But another look at the twins told Dazai that was a bad move. They were being odd enough as it was, he didn't want to push that argument open again.

Didn't want to have to say, "*Of course I knew we might die down here. What difference does that make?"*

Anyway, he could sense magic in all of the potions except for the wine, which meant even the poisons were magical. They probably wouldn't work on him, anyway.

Dazai blinked. *Wait—*

" Well," Dazai said, his brow furrowing in thought, "it's not a very complicated riddle. Snape might be good with potions, but he's not very bright, is he?"

The twins laughed, and Dazai worked to very carefully keep the tension from his face.

"You already know the answer? Our Dazai is too smart," Fred hummed, sounding distinctly pleased. There was an odd edge to his voice, though. "Which one is it?"

"The third one. Blue." Dazai replied, offhand. He ignored the twins as they hovered over the smallest bottle. It was a tiny, rectangular glass filled with a luminescent blue liquid. He wasn't really listening as the others started to look over the riddle again, as if double-checking his work. Dazai suddenly had much bigger problems to worry about.

Namely: the potion *wouldn't work on him.*

This was... an unexpected snag.

Dazai had dodged dangerous beasts, had sneakily nullified Devil's Snare, and had won a game of chess with an admittedly risky gambit. He could do just about anything, if he really wanted to. But, despite all that, Dazai could not pass this trial.

Drinking the potion would render it useless—would prevent Dazai from moving forward.

Dazai, for all his genius, could only really see one option out of this scenario that ended with the Philosopher's Stone in his hands. That *option* being the sting of No Longer Human in his skull.

"Great!" Fred and George cheered. For the first time since the last trial, they actually sounded pleased. Maybe the fact that there wasn't something trying to kill them helped. "Let's all drink and move forward, then."

George picked up the blue vial and uncapped it. He tipped it towards his nose and made a face. "It smells like onion."

"*What?"* Fred squawked, already rushing over to smell it himself.

Dazai wanted to roll his eyes, to steal the potion from their hands, and get this over with.

Instead, he slowly brought a hand to his mouth, frowning deeply. No Longer Human prickled under his skin, burning in time with the flame between them and the stone. *Burning* — because Dazai didn't have a choice but to nullify his way through this one.

"Dazai?"

He blinked, startled from his thoughts. Blaise was watching him with a blank expression. Hearing them, Fred and George looked over as well. There must have been an odd expression on Dazai's face, because they sobered up immediately. That strangely fierce look was in their eyes again, and when Fred asked, "What's wrong?" it only deepened.

Dazai opened his mouth, then closed it. His head hurt.

"Is this not the right potion?" George asked after a second. He slowly lowered it back onto the table.

"...That's correct."

"Then," he frowned, "we're good, right?"

Blaise stared between them for a second. "Why do I get the feeling that you're suddenly on a completely different page than the rest of us?"

The twins briefly looked to one another. Then, warily, George said, "Look, if this is about us pressuring you about risk taking, we aren't really mad. We're just worried about you."

That was... weirdly good to know. But not even remotely the problem right now.

Heat from the flames flickered off Dazai's face, feeling like a *snap* of magic that Dazai was going to have to nullify in front of Fred, George, and Blaise. He'd gone the whole year so far without revealing to anyone that he was sort of *anti-magic incarnate*. That he was something *other.* Even among ability users, Dazai stood out. Nullification was *powerful.* And that it wasn't just abilities, but he could nullify magic, as well? Dazai would always maintain that he was right to keep it a secret this long. There were too many unknowns in the magical community, still.

But that would change now. Because Dazai didn't have a choice but to expose No Longer Human if he wanted to ever leave this room and steal the Philosopher's Stone for Mori.

" Hey," Blaise said, voice low when Dazai didn't stretch one of his fake smiles on for a long few seconds, "what's wrong? Seriously."

Dazai was the leader of a gang, and his subordinates might actually *care* about him. Fred and George were watching him with equally worried expressions, looking a second away from going to his side. Maybe *petting* him again like they had in the infirmary the other day. Dazai took in a deep breath, and quickly considered the situation. He ran his hand down his face then let it drop lifelessly at his side.

"There might be," he paused, "a *small* problem."

"With the potion?" Blaise asked, eyeing the blue vial suspiciously.

"With *me* ."

They were silent for a second. The twins' mouths dropped open, slightly agape. Blaise's brows drew together sharply.

“What?”

“Are you okay?” George asked, hurried. He took an aborted step forward. “Did you get hurt?”

Dazai shook his head, quick to reassure them. “No.” He waved their concern off with a casual hand, and the glow of black fire glinted off of his nails. “It’s...”

Now or never, Dazai thought with a final, mournful glance to the potions. The gang watched him, visibly concerned at Dazai’s sudden change of mood.

“Hmm...” Dazai looked between them before finally settling his gaze on Blaise. “There’s something important I haven’t told any of you,” he finally said.

Immediately, Fred and George stood up straighter. They didn’t look *distrustful,* but that obvious weight of concern was back in their posture. At least it wasn’t that odd, protective anger from before. But Dazai didn’t turn to face the twins. He kept his eyes locked on Blaise, instead. The other snake had a blank frown pasted across his features and something considering behind his eyes. Like he was mentally running through every conversation they had ever shared together.

“What are you talking about, Dazai?”

Dazai chose his words carefully. “You know how I'm awful with magic?” He asked after a pause. “Like, dreadfully bad.”

“Sure,” Fred said, frowning. “It makes you super sick, but that doesn’t stop you from practicing it all the time.”

Nodding, Dazai tilted his head towards the potions. “Well, there’s a reason for that. Its... Look—I'm not going to drag this out, since we’re on a tight schedule.” He kind of *wanted* to drag this out. To stall long enough that he figured out an alternative to using No Longer Human so brazenly n front of his friends.

Because—no matter how much the thought burned—he *didn’t want them to know.* There was a nice, thick line in the ground between *abilities* and *magic* in Dazai’s head. There was *Mori,* and then there was *Snape.* There was *Father’s guard dogs,* and then there was *Fred, George, and Blaise.* And Dazai was about to smear that line into nothing—mix the *bad* with the *weirdly not bad.*

No other option came to mind.

“That potion isn’t going to work on me, and I’m about to do something weird,” he said, “I'm trusting you not to tell anyone. So... please.”

They stared at him. Finally, George said, “What? Why won’t the potion work on you?”

Dazai made a vague, hand-wavey motion in his direction, before turning on his heel to face the black fire blocking their exit. It burned in front of him, hot and loud. The magic fueling it flickered and hissed, begging No Longer Human to stretch out and kill it.

Blaise asked, voice carefully measured, “Is this about the other day? Something Madam Pomfrey and Professor Snape talked with you about?” His face bunched up in thought. “Is the potion going to hurt you?”

“No.” Dazai hummed. He stared the fire down, even when his eyes ached and burned to watch. At his side, Dazai’s fingers twitched. “Well, maybe.”

“Then what—”

Without warning, Dazai raised his hand to the wall of fire. He rested his palm against the blaze, ignoring the shouts ringing out behind him. There was only a split second of heat against his palm before the sharp ring of No Longer Human tore it away. Under his palm, the magic withered and died. The fire around his hand vanished as its fuel was nullified. Only a few seconds later, the rest of the black fire was erased as well.

Immediately, No Longer Human stopped itching under his skin. Instead, it was replaced by a louder, sharper pounding behind his eyes. Dazai let his hand fall flat against his side.

There. It was done.

The weight of No Longer Human seemed to hang in the air—a secret Dazai was forced into revealing against himself. What sort of reaction was he expecting? Even Dazai himself wasn’t sure. They wouldn’t have a reason to hate him for this secret ability (*right?).* But Dazai couldn’t shake the uncertainty from his mind—the damning knowledge that *anything* and *everything* could be used against him somehow. That maybe there was a *good reason* why none of Hogwarts’ books had information on special abilities. Maybe his kind wasn’t safe here. Maybe—

A hand dropped on his head, ruffled his hair, then dropped to a comfortable spot on his shoulder. It was warm, and it immediately shook Dazai from his spiraling, paranoid ideation.

“You looked like you were freaking out,” George said, hovering over him. “Which is super weird, considering none of us were thinking anything bad about... *whatever you just did.”*

“ Yeah,” Fred said, coming up on Dazai’s other side. He was close enough that Dazai could feel him. “We’re not—hey! Don't look so *afraid.* We’re just super confused. What did you *do?”*

Dazai looked to the floor, then back to his gang. The answer pounded in the base of his skull angrily, but seeing the twins look so calm eased his nerves a lot. “I nullified the magic.”

Fred and George blinked. It looked like they were warring to cover up a more dramatic expression. “What?”

“I’ve never heard of something like that.” Blaise’s face was an indescribable mask when he finally came around Dazai’s side.

Dazai shook his head, unsurprised. He took a deep, settling breath. “I didn’t think you would have. There’s nothing about it in the library.”

Blaise's eyes widened, a look of comprehension dawning on him.

Hoping to make himself more clear, Dazai continued, "It's not something I really control. Any magic I touch will inevitably become nullified."

"*Nullified...*" the twins echoed, "You just... *erased a professor's spell?* Like it was nothing?"

"I..." Dazai paused, feeling unsteady as he quickly flipped between Blaise, the twins, and his own weary thoughts. Then, shaking himself, he told them, "Actually, yeah. That's exactly what I did."

Fred and George stared at him, a thousand questions flickering unasked behind their eyes. The intensity startled Dazai, knocking him back half-a-step until George's hand dropped from his shoulder. Something overwhelmed pooled up in his chest.

Abruptly eager to get moving, Dazai frowned, then tipped his head back to indicate the now-open passage. "I can explain—well, kind of. But we should get the stone and get out first. If the professors catch us down here..."

After what felt like an hour, Blaise let out a breath.

"Okay," he said, plain—*reassuring,* "We can talk about this after."

Hearing Blaise agree must have shaken the twins from their own festering inquiries, because they nodded along. "Gosh," Fred said lightly, "Our little brother is full of surprises."

"First you start a gang to go up against the Wizard Mafia, and now you have super powers? You're *definitely* the coolest little bro ever!" George chimed in. "Don't tell Ron."

Blaise snorted. Beside him, Dazai couldn't help the small smile that trickled onto his face.

"Come on," Dazai said, "there should only be one room left."

Slowly and as one, they walked through the doorway. Where black flames once stood, the group now continued, unbidden. On the other side, the hallway was long and dark. Dazai stared down it unperturbed.

"Wait," Fred said suddenly when they were about half-way down the hall. Dazai didn't stop walking, but he did arch his neck around to see his self-proclaimed big brother watching him with wide eyes. "Is *that* why you can't, like, ride a broom? Because you—nullify the charms in it?"

Dazai blinked, and No Longer Human buzzed under his skin. "That's right." He paused, looking away when he saw Fred startle and blink with awe. "The moment I touch a broom—or a wand—the magic will go away. So trying to use either is kind of a moot point."

"But you *can* use magic," Blaise cut in. His face was scrunched up in thought. "I've seen you use incendio—or an approximation thereof."

Dazai nodded. The hallway stretched on around them. “Blaise is sharp as ever,” he commented with a hum. Then, feeling charitable, he elaborated, “I’m a little unclear on the details myself.”

He had theories, of course. But nothing concrete. The library was useless and Mori was eternally a thorn in Dazai’s side. But there was something about the confusion in everyone’s faces—the way that they weren’t persecutory at all—that put Dazai somewhat at ease. It was as if, for the first time in all his eleven years, Dazai was sharing just an *ounce* of his burdens. Honesty was an odd feeling.

He felt strangely light, walking into the room that followed. Ignoring the wide-eyed looks the others kept sending him helped a little, too.

It was another small room, like the potions trial had been previously. The stone walls were close and lit by a long row of flickering torches. But what caught Dazai’s attention immediately was the tall, golden-framed mirror standing in the center of the room. It was at least three-times Dazai’s height and about as wide.

“A mirror?” Fred asked, walking further into the room before stopping.

“Haven’t we beaten all the guards? I don’t see the Philosopher’s Stone.”

Dazai walked up to stand beside Fred, then looked around the room. His eyes, naturally, came to rest on the mirror. A sharp frown pieced itself together on his face as his headache suddenly pounded to life ten-fold. The mirror was *full* of magic. It was definitely charmed in some way, though Dazai didn’t recognize any of the spells on it. Whatever it was, though, it was powerful enough to make Dazai’s vision waver from across the room. Dazai looked into the mirror and squinted to inspect it closer when he realized—

The others gasped around him, staring into the mirror with shock.

There was no reflection in the mirror. Instead, it was a tall, empty expanse. The only thing reflected in it was the sharp flicker of firelight. Dazai opened his mouth to comment on the lack of reflection when Fred said, “Do you guys see that? It’s George and I pranking the whole school!”

“Only the best prank I’ve *ever seen!”* George agreed, pushing himself forward to stare into the mirror.

But... *no.* The mirror was still blank. Dazai narrowed his eyes at it, willing the image to appear, but nothing did. Maybe No Longer Human was nullifying it..? Only, it didn’t *feel* like his ability was active. And he wasn’t even touching the mirror, so—

“I don’t see that,” Blaise said suddenly.

“Oh, me neither.” Dazai nodded.

“I see,” the other snake hummed, then shot a quick glance to Dazai, “our Loyalty Club.” A small smile crossed his face. “We look happy.”

...what?

Something heavy pooled up in Dazai's chest. He stared into the mirror, eyes searching, but couldn't make anything like that appear. While everyone else was seeing something they wanted, Dazai was seeing—

Oh.

He looked to the mirror. It remained empty.

"This must be the Mirror of Erised," Dazai told them, keeping his voice tight and level, "I read about it in the library. Supposedly, it shows the viewer the *deepest, most desperate desires of their heart.*"

"Oh," Fred gaped. He leaned in closer, to stare at his reflection.

Blaise opened his mouth, then closed it. Almost imperceptibly, then, he leaned closer into Dazai's side. The mafioso allowed it. He was too busy glaring into the blank depths of *his* deepest desire to really care.

Nothing. Was there really *nothing* that Dazai desired?

It bubbled up inside him, hot and unwelcome: *nothing in this world would ever make him happy.*

No family or aspiration. No grand achievement, like the twins saw. Simply no reflection. Like looking at a blank canvas, but knowing that *something* should have been painted there. Something. Anything at all. Dazai blinked and the mirror showed him the stone floor. Blinked again—a flicker of candlelight from the far wall.

Where was Doctor Mori, smiling at him, proud? Where was father, saying he did a good job? Useless, hopeless wishes like that. To be normal and happy? Where was his body, hanging limp from a noose?

Dazai glowered, an irrational, aimless anger building up in his chest. It wasn't that he was surprised, really. But to be faced with his own inhumanity like this *hurt.*

"So?" George said, laughing, as he saddled up to Dazai's side and leaned into his shoulder. He was probably beaming, but Dazai would have to move his neck to see it. "What do you see, kiddo?"

"I bet it's you lording over the other students, right? Dazai's mafia reigning supreme?"

It was absolutely nothing. Dazai couldn't even see himself, because no perfect world could ever include him in it. He would never be happy.

Dazai tried for a smile, but couldn't see his reflection to know if it looked right or if it was too brittle around the edges. Whatever weight he had lifted by telling his gang about No Longer Human returned as a crushing debt.

“Yeah. That’s it.” His voice didn’t feel like his own. Hollow. Far-away.

Blaise frowned at him, a cease aching between his brows. There was something infinitely cautious in his eyes, so whatever expression Dazai put on must have not been very convincing. They were standing very close now. Then, without fanfare, Blaise slowly linked his fingers with Dazai. Their held hands hung there, intertwined, for a long moment. It was a warm, unfamiliar weight, and Dazai tore his stare away from the mirror to blink down at them numbly.

“Is that a lie?” Blaise asked.

Someone made a choked-sounding noise beside him. Dazai look up and saw the twins watching him and Blaise with a matching pinch between their brows. *Ah,* he must not have sounded convincing at all, then.

Dazai shook himself, forcibly, from his own (aching) self-pity, but didn’t release Blaise’s hand form his own. “Do any of you see the stone?” He asked instead of answering. He looked around, dully, to search for the stone. But the only magical signature in the room came from the Mirror of Erised. It was powerful, giving off magic in steady waves that prickled under Dazai’s skin and made his head spin.

“No,” Blaise said after a second. He gave Dazai’s fingers a squeeze. “I don’t see it. Did either of you find anything?”

Fred and George glanced to each other, then shook their heads.

“Only what the mirror is showing us,” George said, “but that’s not the stone.”

“Are we sure it's in this room?”

Dazai nodded mutely, his eyes unconsciously returning to the mirror’s empty reflection once again. A sharp pain pierced through his brain. He made an aborted movement to pinch the bridge of his nose, but instead his hand merely twitched in Blaise’s.

Once again, Dazai was struck with the realization that the mirror was exuding *a lot* of magic. Almost *too much* magic, for being just a charmed mirror. Dazai tried to focus on the sensation. There was a silent buzz of energy coming from the mirror itself—a sharp, complicated layer of charms washed over the whole thing. But there was something else as well. Tucked underneath the mirror and its many, many charms was a different magical signature entirely. Dazai had to close his eyes to focus on it fully. It felt old and unfamiliar and exceedingly, *excessively,* powerful.

“The Philosopher’s Stone,” he said, opening his eyes, “It’s in the mirror.”

The others blinked at him, then turned back to the Mirror of Erised.

Blaise tilted his head. “How do we get it out?”

Dazai shrugged. He looked around the frame of the mirror, but didn’t find any indication that it would open up. Following his lead, the twins carefully stepped around the back of the

mirror. After a second, they came back around, shaking their heads.

So there was no way to open the mirror manually. Was he missing something? Maybe it was Dazai's own horrid presence, reflectionless, preventing success. Or maybe...

"I don't think we're supposed to be able to get the stone," he said with a thoughtful frown, "It's locked in there, so the professors can have evidence Quirrell tried to get it, but he won't *actually* get it."

Fred and George opened their mouths, then closed them again.

"What do you want to do, Dazai?" Blaise asked after a moment.

Dazai closed his eyes, willing his nausea to subside. When he opened them again, the Mirror of Erised towered over him an empty mask. Carefully, Dazai pried his fingers out of Blaise's hold. He held them hovered over the mirror's glass sheen. "We *aren't* meant to get the stone, but Dumbledore doesn't know about—" *my ability*, he almost said, but held his tongue last second, "—me."

Someone gasped, surprise in their voice when they asked, "You mean your—uh, *nullification thing?"*

Wordlessly, Dazai raised his finger out to the mirror. No Longer Human spiked painfully. The second he poked the glass, it shattered into a million violent pieces. The shards clattered against the floor and skittered across the room. Whatever charms made the mirror functional shattered as well. When Dazai drew his hand back, his knuckles were bloodied from the projectile glass shards.

Once the broken glass settled, Blaise, Fred, and George rushed to Dazai's side at the face of the broken mirror.

"Are you okay?!" George asked. Dazai blinked in his direction, frowning when he noticed the others were *also* now wearing a few cuts from the glass.

"Why did it *explode?!"*

Dazai took a step back from the mirror, but stopped when more glass cracked beneath his shoe. "Not sure," he said, humming. He raised his hand to his face to inspect the cuts there. His fingers were red and wet, but not especially hurt. Thoughtlessly, he drew a bloodied finger to his mouth and licked the appendage clean. "The magic must have been keeping it held together."

Blaise, still at Dazai's side, looked back to the mirror with a contemplative frown between his eyes. Now that the glass was shattered, there was only the golden frame left standing. Dazai followed his gaze, looking in the now-broken mirror for anything of interest.

Clink.

A faint red light glowed in the corner of Dazai's vision. Slowly, he turned his head to the floor, eyes skipping over the glass shards.

A small, red gem no larger than a quarter rolled out of the shattered mirror and came to a stop at his foot.

Dazai blinked. He felt weak and dizzy at the sudden intense wave of magical power washing off of the gemstone. It felt ancient and infinite, he thought distantly.

Numbly, Dazai bent down. He heard the others ask what he was doing, but Dazai ignored them. Withdrawing the silk, blue bag from his cloak, Dazai carefully maneuvered the stone into his hand. He was diligent not to touch the stone—knowing both that he would destroy it, and that it would make him sick for *weeks.* Dazai pulled the drawstrings closed, cutting of the Philosopher Stone's red glow from the world. It still hummed with noxious power in his palm.

It was *his,* it was *Mori's,* it *wasn't Quirrell's.*

When Dazai looked up at last, his gang was watching him with wide, curious eyes. Dazai held up the bag. "The Philosopher's Stone," he grinned, "I've got it."

They blinked. Then, one by one, Fred, George, and Blaise grinned back.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading and commenting ily!! yall are the best :)
anyway my writing schedule can now be best described as "functionally nonexistent" so thats promising

see yall next week!!

Undercover

Chapter Summary

The day after Dazai and his gang steal the Philosopher's Stone.

Some of the characters talk about Dazai's self-harm habits in this chapter, so tread carefully if need be.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What do you mean *Dazai has a superpower?”* Ron’s mouth fell agape, a look of brief annoyance pinching his expression together.

Fred and George leaned forward, conspiratorial, with matching grins. Dazai raised a hand to cut them off before they could take their teasing too far.

Their group consisted of Dazai, Blaise, the twins, Hermione, and Ron. They were bunched up together at far-end of the Gryffindor table during breakfast, whispering amongst themselves in light of the previous night. Every so often, their group would get an odd look from the other students. Dazai pointedly ignored the watching eyes, only looking up every so often to glare at anyone who wandered close enough to eavesdrop.

“Keep your voice down," Dazai whispered harshly, “It’s not a *superpower,* Ron*,* it’s a *secret* .”

“Fred and George called it a superpower first,” Ron countered, petulant.

Dazai merely shrugged, and Ron glowered.

“So you can just erase magic?” Hermione jumped in. She was practically bouncing in her seat. The gleam in her eyes said she was beyond intrigued about this new revelation. When Dazai nodded, she continued, “Is it just charms and potions? Or does that include animagi and curses? And what about—”

“Easy there, Hermione!” Fred said with a laugh. George tittered at his side. “This isn’t a book report!”

Dazai sighed, then rested his head in the palms of his hands. Not for the first time, Dazai wished the student dining tables would manifest coffee. After their midnight excursion to get the stone was complete, Dazai and his gang didn’t return to their dorms until after four A.M. He and Blaise had sneaked into their common room unnoticed and promptly said goodnight to one another. Dazai had been hoping for a short nap before having to get up for breakfast,

but had been too distracted by the Philosopher's Stone to get much rest. All night, the waves of power rolling off the stone prickled at the edge of his awareness. It kept him awake. That, and the turbulent buzz of thoughts in Dazai's head asking: *what next?*

Rubbing at his eyes, Dazai rolled his neck to watch his friends sleepily chat. Looking at his little group, Dazai couldn't regret revealing the nature of his ability to them. Although he'd still kept most of the truth to himself, Dazai couldn't bring himself to quite regret revealing No Longer Human. He was *way* too tired for that now.

Hermione was still bubbling with excitement when Dazai blinked over at her. "I've never heard of something like this before. I have *so much* research to do!"

Dazai frowned into his palm, which was littered with more bandages than normal now, thanks to the glass cuts. "You won't find anything," he told her idly.

She titled her head. Then, comprehension dawning in her eyes, Hermione gasped, "*That's* what you've been researching all year!"

Dazai raised his hand in a vague gesture.

"And you haven't found *anything?"*

" Nope." Dazai hummed, then yawned. His whole face prickled with exhaustion. "There's nothing to find. Magic and I just don't get along."

Hermione bit her lip, clearly still excited at the prospect of some new, grand research endeavor. Dazai knew, realistically, there was nothing he could do to stop her from looking. Not that it really mattered—there really *wasn't* anything about abilities in the library, let alone about *nullification abilities.* There was absolutely no way for Hermione to trace him back to special abilities or the Port Mafia. Thinking this, Dazai let some of the tension bleed out of his shoulders. It wasn't hard to melt into the table after that.

He was *exhausted.*

When he peeked up from behind his arms, Hermione wore an odd look on her face. In askance, Dazai raised a lazy brow. She let out a breath. "I'm sorry, I just... are you *sure* there isn't any research I can do?" She bit into an apple, looking annoyed, "Maybe it's a curse! I can study curses."

"You *can* study it, but there's nothing to find."

Mori probably knew something about No Longer Human and its relationship to magic. Mori always had information. But the insufferable doctor never told him anything, and Dazai had finally come to the conclusion that even trying to ask Mori was a useless endeavor.

Speaking of Mori, Dazai had a fresh, unopened letter sitting on his bed this week. He'd have to make time to read over it later and write a proper response telling Mori he'd collected the Philosopher's Stone. Maybe not today though. No—today Dazai was planning to sleep and sleep and sleep until the stone stopped giving him such a bad headache.

Sitting up straight, Dazai rested his hand on his chest. The small pouch tucked in there was a heavy, powerful weight. It was sickening to be so close to the stone, but Dazai didn't feel right about leaving it behind in his room. It was safer that way—once Quirrell realized the stone was already stolen, Dazai could only imagine what he would do.

A desperate mafioso who had failed his mission...

Right. Dazai felt a trickle of fear run up his spine at just the thought. Lucky for Dazai, he was the more successful of the two mafiosos here. The stone hummed with ancient energy in his pocket, a token of his victory over Quirrell's less-effective mafia.

Dazai dropped his hand from his chest and turned his eyes to where the professors' table was just starting to fill up. Quirrell was already seated, passing a faraway look around the room. Snape and McGonagall were chatting quietly amongst themselves as they ate. Quickly hobbling to the table, Hagrid seemed to be in a hurry to sit and eat.

"I don't get why you kept this from us," Ron was saying when Dazai finally tuned them back in, "But I guess you always have been a bit..."

Dazai blinked. "What?"

"*Paranoid,"* Ron finished, wearing a quirk to his lips that could have either been amusement or derision. "*Weird.* I don't know."

"Aren't you the paranoid one, giving our friendship rules?" Dazai deadpanned.

When Ron didn't snipe back at him after a too-long moment, Dazai turned his full attention to the Gryffindor. Ron wore an expression like he was remembering something unpleasant. Seeming to realize everyone's eyes were on him, Ron shook himself. "Is that why you always get sick after doing magic, then?"

Abruptly, Blaise sat up straighter, his expression hardening. The twins seemed to shift as well, but didn't look nearly as urgent.

Dazai shrugged. "That's the working theory." Then, anticipating Blaise's overprotective objections, he quickly tacked on, "Madam Pomfrey is looking into it."

More-or-less. She was missing *a lot* of the details, but Dazai didn't trust the doctor nearly as much as he did his gang members. Besides, it wasn't like she was going to find a *cure* to No Longer Human anyway.

"Oh," Blaise hummed, "that's good."

He must have been remembering their various adventures in the infirmary. Dazai let the snake have a moment to collect his thoughts, turning to eye the other students instead. The other Gryffindors were keeping a wide berth of their little group—whether due to Dazai's being a Slytherin or the glares he kept flashing out, Dazai couldn't be sure. Over at the Slytherin table, Dazai caught sight of Pansy and Draco sitting together.

“So it’s a superpower *and* a handicap,” George said sagely, “Hey, does that mean you could have accidentally nullified the Philosopher’s Stone, too? If you hadn't been so careful handling it, I mean.”

Dazai opened his mouth to respond, but before he could, his eyes passed over the professors.

Most of the staff were present now: Snape, McGonagall, Pomfrey, Sprout, and a few others. But that was hardly significant enough to capture his attention. Instead, it was the way they were all huddled together, frantically whispering to one another that made Dazai’s breath catch. Hagrid was at the center of them, gesturing wildly with his hands. Every few seconds, the professors would search around the room for something. When Snape’s eyes flicked to Quirrell for the tenth time, Dazai knew:

They’ve realized that the Philosopher’s Stone is missing.

″ Hey,” Dazai interrupted Fred before he could finish telling a joke, “looks like something big happened.”

The others blinked, immediately turning to follow Dazai’s turned-up chin. They followed the point of his chin in the direction of the professors, then quickly snapped their eyes back to Dazai. He let a small grin flicker across his face.

“They know about last night!” Fred said in a hushed but energetic voice. Beside him, George vibrated with a manic sort of excitement. “Wish I could have a better look at their faces right now.”

Hermione made a low sound, “Just being *acquainted* with troublemakers like you lot makes me sick. I can’t believe you roped me into this.”

“If it’s for a good reason...” Ron said, trailing off with a brief glance to Dazai.

The mafioso shrugged. He turned back to watch the professors, morbidly interested in watching them flail and panic. Sure enough, they were looking distressed. Dazai supposed that losing an immortality-granting stone would do that to someone, though. He passed his gaze between them, then finally came to a stop.

Quirrell was staring at him from across the room. His expression was a dark and heavy thing, but his eyes were wide and almost surprised. Dazai titled his head back, split a wide, childish grin across his face, and waved.

Quirrell’s mouth jaw dropped like a stone. Something dangerous in his eyes—something *appraising.*

Not even a second passed, and Quirrell schooled his expression. His head whipped to the side and he said something to the group. Dazai followed his gaze to see Professor Snape, who must have said something to get Quirrell’s attention like that. For a split second, Dazai thought he saw Snape’s eyes flit to him. But the moment was too short to be sure.

That was enough brazen ogling for now, Dazai thought. Purposeful, he turned back to Fred and George. “Hey,” he said, catching their attention away from where the staff was gathered, “Just in case, I want you two to come up with an alibi. I’m sure Ron and Hermione would love to help.”

“You think they know it was you?” Ron asked, a little uneasy.

“I wouldn’t rule out the possibility,” Dazai said after a pause. He glanced to Hermione, who was nervously shifting in her seat. “Stop looking over at them, or you’ll make us look guilty.”

“You *are* guilty.”

Dazai huffed. “*More guilty,* then.”

“Anyway, *I’m* not the one who was *waving at them!”*

“ That’s different,” Dazai said, but didn’t bother to expand on the topic. Trying to explain the strange hostility between himself and Professor Quirrell wasn’t something Dazai ever really indented to bother with. In the meantime,...

“What about us?”

Dazai frowned. He looked to Blaise, waiting for the boy to continue.

“We can’t use the same alibi as Fred and George, since that would put us in the *Gryffindor* common rooms all night.” Blaise leaned forward to rest his head in his palm. “And I don’t think *Pansy* is going to cover for you.”

Draco might help him, but Blaise was right. If they tried to squeeze a fake alibi out of Pansy and Draco, there was a pretty good chance that Pansy would use the opportunity to sabotage Dazai.

Humming thoughtfully, Dazai mentally ran through their options. He let his eyes wander back to the professors. They weren’t bunched together anymore. Now, they were all seated at the table in perfect silence. Lips pressed into thin, white lines, none of them even reached for their food. A strange dread seemed to loom over their table. Dazai couldn't bring himself to feel sorry, seeing as he was still the victor in this situation.

The only two left standing were Snape and Hagrid. They marched across the room with purpose.

Off to see the Headmaster?

Snape guided Hagrid through the rows of student tables. Dazai’s gang went abruptly silent as they passed. For a brief second, Snape met Dazai’s eyes. Then he left the Great Hall without a word.

“We’ll figure it out,” Dazai said, breaking the long silence, “I always do, you know.”

Albus Dumbledore should have been at breakfast with them, but he wasn't. With the Philosopher's Stone in such a precarious position and Quirrell still silently scheming, Severus had considered holing himself in his office as well. Pouring over papers and plans had certainty *seemed* like a reasonable thing to do. To learn everything they could in order to strike Quirrell before the stone went missing, only at the cost of a reasonable breakfast hour? Severus was all on board for that.

But then Hagrid had burst in through the Great Hall, panicked and whispering about a break-in. And very suddenly their entire plan had crumbled to bits.

" I was just comin' over to feed Fluffy when I saw the trapdoor was left open," Hagrid said, voice wobbly. Severus drew up his nose at the mention of the three-headed dog. *Fluffy—* what a childish name for such a monstrous beast.

Severus glanced over his shoulder see the panic written clearly across Hagrid's face. The bearded man gave Fluffy a hearty pat on one of their heads. The dog slobbered clumsily in return. When Severus looked back to the trapdoor, he was sure of it: *someone had been in here.*

Albus hummed, stroking his long, white beard in thought. There was something tense in his expression that Severus couldn't make out. "It is possible," the headmaster said after a short moment, "that the Philosopher's Stone was not stolen. After all, Quirrell has not yet fled the campus, as I suspect he would have had he been successful."

Severus nodded, but didn't feel any sense of relief wash over him at the prospect. *Quirrell had completely evaded their watch last night—* it was more horrifying than anything else. How had the man slipped the many, many eyes Hogwarts had on him?

"At the very least, the Mirror of Erised should not have relinquished its hold on the stone to Quirrell." As Albus spoke, he slowly levered the trap door fully open. "I will need to refortify the guards—Severus?"

"I'm coming," he barked out. Dumbledore didn't look surprised, merely offered a tight-looking smile.

"Very well," Dumbledore said with a hum. He began climbing down the door at once. "Rubeus," he addressed Hagrid, "stand guard until we return."

"Aye."

Without another word, Dumbledore and Snape descended into the chamber below. Their descent was cast in perfect shadow, save for the sliver of light coming from above. After a

long, quiet moment, both Snape and Dumbledore reached the floor below. Something tickled at the back of Severus' mind—

"It seems," Albus began. His voice no longer held any of its usual pleasantness. It was serious and contemplative—the strategic mastermind most of the wizarding community would only ever hear rumor of. "That our intruder has completely destroyed Pomona's Devil's Snare."

Severus blinked, glancing to the floor as he realized what was wrong with the room. What had once been covered in the deadly, choking vine was now cold and barren. There were a few thick roots and leaves scattered about the room, but otherwise *nothing remained.* His frowned deepened. "No scorch marks," Severus commented with a bite, "it wasn't burnt."

"Indeed," Albus hummed, "so how was it destroyed so utterly?"

The question lingered in the air for a long moment, but no answer manifested itself.

Severus bit his tongue, scowling at the shadowed room. *How had Quirrell done this?* It shouldn't have been possible to destroy the magical plant like this. But sure enough...

Albus kicked a withered vine across the floor, a contemplative look to his face. Finally, he turned from the floor and started towards the next room. "I will ask Pomona what she believes may have been responsible."

Although Severus nodded, he wasn't feeling at all satisfied with that conclusion. Still, he held his tongue and followed along in silence. As they walked, his quiet hope that Quirrell didn't have the stone began to falter more and more. Against all odds, the destroyed Devil's Snare was *not* the most perplexing thing they found in the stone's chambers.

Dumbledore guided Severus through a massive room with a frown, staring down at a pile of broken and twitching keys. Quirrell had not only *passed* the trial, but he had completely *demolished it.* Then, passing through Minerva's room, they found the board a smattering of shattered chess pieces that indicated a swift and certain victory for black.

But the clean victories over those rooms held *nothing* over what came after. The mountain troll's room had seemingly been *bypassed entirely.* Aside from the two broken brooms on the floor, Severus wouldn't have even guessed that the intruder made it this far. Just as Severus was beginning to think, *of course this room was easy, it* was *Quirrell's own guard, after all,* the next room completely threw him.

"Quirrell didn't drink the potion," he said, mouth dropping open.

Dumbledore came up to his side, expression unreadable. "Indeed." He turned his gaze up to where the fire wall was *supposed to be.* "And yet, our intruder seems to have passed through."

"That's not *possible,"* Severus ground out. He took a step forward to inspect the potions, and while they had certainly been moved, not even one had been ingested. "How did he trick the spell?"

“I’m not sure he did,” Albus hummed. At Severus’ clear disbelief, he continued in a measured tone, “Take a look, Severus. It is as if the fire-blocking charm were never in place to begin with.”

In point, Albus walked directly through where the flames were meant to pass. Severus glowered.

“You think he just *erased the spell.* "

Albus tipped his head back, contemplative. “I see no other alternative. However improbable —”

“*Impossible.”*

“ —it may appear.”

Dumbledore met his eyes, then quickly began his march into the next room. There was a renewed sense of urgency in his steps—one Severus hadn’t seen in *years.* Not since the First Wizarding War. Not since—

“It seems Voldemort—” Severus winced minutely as Dumbledore spoke, “—may have more power than we anticipated, to do such a thing.”

Fear. That’s what the look on Albus’ face was. *He’s afraid that the stone was already stolen —that we’ve already lost.*

A jolt of worry shocked through Severus at the realization. He hurried to Dumbledore’s side immediately, rushing to reach the final room.

Crack!

Severus came to an abrupt stop. Slowly, he lifted his foot to see what he had stepped on. *Glass.* It was scattered all across the stone floor, tiny shards of...

Realization struck Snape and his eyes widened.

Albus seemed to have reached the same conclusion as he shot through the room like a lightning bolt sent free. Severus followed, his heart thudding in his chest. *It couldn’t be—*

The Mirror of Erised stood in the middle of the room, glass shattered out from it like an explosion. The mirror was broken.

“*Merlin’s beard,”* Severus swore under his breath. Dread pooled in his stomach. “Quirrell...”

Albus nodded, grave. “The Philosopher’s Stone has been stolen.” He took in a deep breath, seeming to calm whatever storm of emotions was brewing beneath the depths. Or perhaps he just smothered it—tempered it until he could fully panic later. For all his flaws, one of Dumbledore’s greatest strengths had always been his ability to remain level headed in even the most dire of circumstances. Even now, when Severus was standing beside him, one breath away from full-on panic.

“The Mirror of Erised is held together by countless complex charms and spells,” Albus continued, resting his palm on the broken mirror’s frame, “to dismantle them all in such a manner would take incredible magical control.”

“Quirrell doesn’t have that level of power,” Severus replied, willing himself to remain as collected as the headmaster was. “This shouldn’t even be *possible.”*

“ Yet here we are.” Albus dropped his hand to his side. “I suspect,” he said haltingly, “we have underestimated Voldemort’s influence, Severus.”

Severus frowned, a furrow in his brows, as he worked out Albus’ meaning. After a pause, he ground out, “He has an ally in the school.”

The realization shot through him like a knife. They had let someone slip by completely unnoticed! But all of the other professors had been working at Hogwarts for some time now, which meant...

The second realization was *worse.*

“A student?!”

Albus closed his eyes, at least having the decency to look abashed for suggesting the idea. “Perhaps not. I find it difficult to believe a student would be capable of this.” He gestured to the shattered glass in point. “But you know as well as I that it would be impossible for anyone to sneak onto Hogwarts ground without our knowing.”

“It *is* impossible for a student to do this,” Severus growled. But at the same time, something had sparked in his mind. A memory, an idea, a lingering concern.

Something must have shown on his face, because not a second later, and Albus calmly inquired, “Severus?”

Dazai Osamu.

The boy who wandered Hogwarts at all hours of the night—was he getting *lost,* or was he *looking for something?* The boy who smiled like he has something to hide. Who had spent a sizable chunk of the school year sitting right in Quirrell’s palm. *Who had bandages on his fingers this morning like he’d punched a mirror.*

Holding a breath, Severus bit out a tense, “Dazai Osamu.”

Albus’ eyes narrowed. “You’ve mentioned him before.” He turned his full attention to Severus, momentarily abandoning his post at the broken Mirror of Erised. “The boy Quirrell was mentoring.”

“*Indoctrinating,”* Snape corrected with a hiss. Because that must have been what it was, right? Damn! He should have stepped in as soon as he heard about Quirrell’s interest in Dazai, regardless of Albus’ hesitance.

“We cannot be certain of the boy’s involvement, Severus,” Albus reminded him, “This was accomplished by an exceptional wizard, after all. Dazai Osamu is only a first-year, isn’t he?”

“He is. But that doesn’t change anything.” Severus glared, no longer hiding his open hostility for the situation, “I *told* you Quirrell’s involvement with my snake was dangerous. This refusal to consider anything other than your so-called *bigger picture* is what’s landed us in this situation!”

Albus raised a hand, cutting off any of Severus’ further arguments. “That is enough, Severus,” he said, any anger muted behind a knowing gaze.

Severus took in a shaking breath.

“I do not believe your student is capable of something like this,” Albus said clearly, “However, if you suspect he may have information about Quirrell, I will permit you to interrogate the boy on this matter.”

Lips falling into a thin line, Severus practically growled. He managed to hold his tongue, if only for the fact that Albus had finally turned to leave the room. Severus followed behind without complaint. It wasn’t until they were out of the dungeons and back with Hagrid and Fluffy that Severus had calmed himself enough to speak once more.

“I will talk with Mr. Dazai immediately,” he confirmed. He took a step to quickly leave the room, but another voice stopped him short.

“Dazai?” Hagrid’s rough voice inquired, “Oh! So you were tha’ professor those boys were helpin’ out, Severus! Don’t see why they couldn’t o’ just told me that.”

Severus stopped dead in his tracks. That familiar dread seemed to be smothering him whole, now. Whirling on his heels, Severus stomped forward until he was practically pressed up against Hagrid’s chest. “*What?”*

“ Er...” Hagrid stumbled back half-a-step, earning a whine from Fluffy when he abruptly stopped petting one of their heads. “Was I not s’posed to say so?”

“What *exactly* are you referring to?”

Hagrid blinked, then paled. He started petting Fluffy again and stood closer to them as if they were anchoring him down. His eyes quickly shot to Dumbledore, who, Severus noticed, had also suddenly grown very serious.

“The boys—er, Dazai and those Weasley twins—came to my hut last month askin’ ‘bout the Philosopher’s Stone. Told me one o’ there professors was havin’ them investigate it.” Hagrid shuffled on his feet, looking decidedly ill. “Was that... *were you not..?”*

Severus drew in a sharp breath.

He *knew* he should have kept a closer eye on that problem child! Dazai was clearly still involved with Quirrell, despite what the boy had said that night over tea. Severus should have known—should have kept pushing instead of giving Dazai some space. So many *should-*

haves, and not the least of them was letting Dazai continue to spiral down his clearly self-destructive path.

“I believe,” Albus said carefully, “you’ll want to interrogate the boy now, Severus.”

Severus found Dazai and his mismatched group all clustered together in the library some thirty minutes later. It wasn’t an unusual place to find the boy, really. What was odd was that Dazai wasn’t even pretending to be reading any of the books piled around him. Instead, he was lagging forward in his seat looking-half asleep at best. Most of their group—Blaise, Fred, and George—were similarly lazing around the table. On closer inspection, Severus realized, it was really only Hermione and Ron who were flipping through books.

He squinted down at the textbook currently being propped open: *Weird Wizarding Dilemmas and Their Solutions.*

“Making nose hairs into ringlets...” Hermione read aloud, a disgruntled look on her face, “That’s not helpful at all!”

Dazai grunted, nonplussed. “Told you there was nothing to find.”

Well, Severus thought with a frown, *this wasn’t exactly the serious conversation he would have expected from a group that supposedly just stole an ancient and incredibly powerful artifact. Still...*

“ There has to be *something!”*

Abruptly, Severus cleared his throat, cutting-off whatever literary tangent Hermione had been about to begin. Immediately, several pairs of eyes shot to him. Dazai’s were among them—the boy sitting up ram-rod straight and staring at him with narrowed eyes.

“Professor!” Dazai greeted, taking charge of the conversation before it even began. Around him, Dazai’s friends seemed to acquiesce to his leadership easily. They went quiet, allowing Dazai to speak. Severus noted the interaction with a small frown. “What brings you here? Come to pester Blaise for letting you get attacked by a fire salamander?”

“Hey,” Blaise objected.

Severus huffed out a breath. “No,” he growled. “I need to speak with you. Now.”

Dazai blinked, but didn’t look surprised. Hovering over their book, Ron and Hermione shuffled in their seats. The Weasley twins tensed up as well. While Severus didn’t take his stare off of Dazai, he did clock the reactions. *They looked nervous. Afraid.* Then, with grim certainty, Severus knew: *something definitely happened last night. Dammit, Problem Child!*

“ Now?” Dazai asked with a yawn.

“*Now,”* Severus said, carefully levering a hiss into his voice. “The rest of you, *do not move.* I will be back to speak with you momentarily.”

Dazai stood from his chair, but not before giving his friends a nod and a measured look each. Only then did the young snake push his chair back under the table and walk to Severus’ side. “Where to, Professor?” He asked, voice deceptively calm.

Severus watched in silence for a short moment before finally replying. “My office.” Having said that, Severus firmly gripped Dazai’s shoulder in his hand. He ignored the muted flinch that ran through the boy, letting his own dread and anger fortify the motion. Gripping hard, Severus pushed Dazai through the library and into the halls. Dazai let himself be pulled along without complaint, despite looking almost sick at the hand on his shoulder.

Every so often as they walked, Dazai would shoot him a short, thoughtful glance. However, it wasn’t until Severus had locked his office door and sat down behind his desk that the boy actually spoke, “Dragging me all the way over here... are you at least going to make tea again?”

Severus growled, low and heavy. That weary anger bubbled to life ten-fold.

Anger—but not at Dazai. *No,* Severus had known Dazai all year. Known that he was a troubled young boy. He was angry with *himself* for letting Quirrell manipulate his snake. Angry at *Quirrell* for being what he was. Angry at *Albus*...

Just... *angry.* And that cheeky, self-satisfied grin on Dazai’s face wasn’t helping in the slightest.

“Last night,” he bit out, no longer willing to pretend at pleasantries, “*what did you do, boy?”*

Dazai blinked, then look away. Severus frowned when he realized that he *still* couldn’t quite read the expressions painted across that face. It was silent for a long moment, and Severus almost thought to start shouting, if he wasn’t *still* reeling from how Dazai could flinch away from the slightest movements, at times.

“Hagrid has already informed me of your investigation into the Philosopher’s Stone,” he ground-out when Dazai didn't respond for too long a moment, “*Do not think that you can lie to me.”*

Something must have jarred Dazai from his thoughts, because he turned to stare at Severus with a frown between his brows. After a second, that odd expression fell away into confusion. “Er...” Dazai said, clearly choosing his words very carefully when he continued, “I was just curious about it, Sir. What does that have to do with... last night?”

There had been a slight pause in Dazai’s words, and Severus latched onto it like a starving piranha. “Do *not* play games with me. I may have been willing to overlook your behaviors in the past, but *conspiring against Hogwarts* is not one of them.”

Unexpectedly, Dazai didn't recoil at all in response to the accusation. Severus had anticipated *something,* given how shaken the boy could be at times—especially when confronted by authority, he knew. That night over tea, for instance... Now, however, Dazai did little more than bristle.

Once again, Severus was overcome with the feeling that Dazai's expression was a *lie,* somehow.

"I have nothing against Hogwarts," Dazai said, defensive, after a short pause.

Severus felt his eyes narrow, then let out a weary breath. Dazai *could* be lying. The boy was certainly calm enough to manage it, unlike he had been on *that* night. This interrogation was getting them nowhere fast. Biting the inside of his mouth, Severus called upon his magic to summon his tea kettle to his side. He started heating it over a small flame as Dazai watched.

Once the water was heating, he turned his full focus back onto Dazai. "Explain."

"Explain..?"

"*Everything,"* Severus said carefully. "How did you learn about the stone? Did Quirrell tell you about it?"

Severus drew two mugs magically to the desk, never once removing his eyes from Dazai. In his seat across the table, Dazai looked the picture of calm. It was... *offsetting.* Any student would look worried when being interrogated by their professor (especially one with a reputation like Severus'). But Dazai looked at ease, if not a little confused. It wasn't *right.* Not when Severus *knew* the boy could panic and fret. Had *seen* Dazai do *just that* in the very same chair he sat in now.

As was becoming too-frequent a phenomenon with his problem child, Severus' immediate assessment was that Dazai Osamu's entire persona was *fake.*

"Ah," Dazai said, "Well, I heard about that from you, actually."

Severus blanked. Tilting his head, Dazai offered him a slim smile and riled up that private anger in Severus once again. "I'm sure I would recall telling you such a thing."

"You didn't tell *me*, perse," Dazai said, and that was suddenly all Severus needed to know.

His eyes narrowed, sharp. "When?"

"Over winter break, in the woods. I followed Professor Quirrell into the forest and decided to hang around for a while when I heard my very favorite Professor Snape was sneaking around, too."

A long frown drew itself across Severus' face. He covered up the expression by busying himself with the water, which was nearly heated now. He pulled it off the magical fire before it could start *hissing* more than it already was. While preparing two cups, Severus concluded, "Quirrell didn't tell you about it."

“No.” Dazai looked to the tea, then back to Severus. “I told you my remedial lessons stopped after break when Professor Quirrell decided he wanted to be a stick-in-the-mud. Anyway, I thought this Philosopher’s Stone sounded interesting, but I didn’t go looking for it or anything.” Then, showing his first real indication of discomfort since their meeting began, Dazai asked, “...What does any of this have to do with last night?”

Severus weighed his options. If Dazai really didn’t know what was going on, revealing that the Philosopher’s Stone had been stolen could be *disastrous.* But if the boy *was* involved and was merely lying about it...

They couldn’t afford to let the Philosopher’s Stone slip out of Hogwarts’ hands.

Something *still* wasn’t adding up, though. Dazai was involved with Quirrell, but didn’t seem to be aligned with *anyone,* let alone the Dark Lord. He snooped around the castle and was dodgy about most things. Severus let out a breath, then gestured to Dazai’s fingers, which were wrapped up a new set of bandages. “What happened there?” He finally asked, thinking of the Mirror of Erised, now standing broken in the bowels of the school.

Dazai twitched like he wanted to hide his hands beneath the desk. Severus stopped him with a heavy glare.

“Nothing,” the boy grumbled out after a second. He shuffled in his seat, looking uncomfortable in a way that seemed not to be a lie.

Severus leveled him with a glare.

Again, Dazai squirmed in his seat. Something like horror begin to consume Severus—Dazai was *clever.* He wouldn’t be looking so obviously upset if this wasn’t something big. *Something* like stealing the Philosopher’s Stone. Although, if Quirrell really *hadn’t* asked the boy to take it...

That train of thought was abruptly cut off when Dazai mumbled, “Why do you keep asking me about last night? I was with Blaise all yesterday, you know.”

“*Last night,”* Severus emphasized the words carefully, “there was a major breach in Hogwarts security.” He waited for a second to watch Dazai’s expression, but the boy’s frown was blank. “I’m *sure* you can figure out why you are a major suspect.”

Dazai’s brows furrowed, and Severus wondered if the snake was trying to parse out the meaning behind his words. After a second, Dazai blinked.

Out after curfew, meetings with Quirrell, cuts on his fingers... not to mention the other unusual circumstances surrounding Dazai’s existence at Hogwarts.

Dazai must have realized how suspicious he looked as well, because he repeated his alibi more forcefully. “I was with Blaise all night.”

“Mr. Zabini.” Severus knew him, of course. An average student, all around, who had somehow become wrapped up with Dazai’s personal band of chaos agents.

Dazai nodded. His eyes flicked to the warmed tea. Severus sighed, then withdrew the honey from where he stored it. He raised it over Dazai's mug, but stopped before pouring any in.

"I told you I don't like honey," Dazai cut in, eyes lidded.

He poured the honey in, anyway.

It was swirling around in the bitter tea, sweetening the brew, when Severus slid it across the desk. Dazai took it between his bandaged fingers with a small, performative frown on his lips. Steam spilled out of the mug and warmed over the boy's hands.

Severus fixed his own tea and willed himself to keep from shouting. "Problem child," he said over a pillow of hot steam, "do you expect me to believe an alibi coming from your *best friend?* Do you take me for an idiot?"

There was a pause, where Dazai seemed to actually be mulling the question over. Severus had to bodily stop himself from snatching the boy's tea back angrily when he realized.

Dazai offered an amused smirk, then took a slow sip of his tea. When he pulled the mug away from his face, his expression was distant and unreadable again. *Cautious* was the word that sprung to Severus' mind. Dazai was being *cautious*.

" Blaise and I stayed awake all night," Dazai supplied, words clearly chosen with great care. He tapped a vague rhythm into the mug trapped between his palms. Severus' eyes immediately latched onto the bandages there. At the disbelieving gaze coming his way, Dazai doubled-down, "I'm not lying about that."

He *wasn't.* Dazai was fantastic at putting on masks, but Severus didn't think the boy was lying now. It was in the way that Dazai looked distinctly *nervous,* that really convinced Severus. Not nervous like he was seconds from being caught in a lie, but nervous like he was about to admit to something he really, *really* didn't want to say.

Severus held his breath, waiting for the confession that would follow—

"He took my knife away," Dazai said, voice little more than a petulant whisper now. He flexed his fingers out, showing off the bandages there. "Then bothered me about not doing stupid things all night long."

The realization crashed down on Severus like a bag of stones.

Dazai averted his gaze and hid behind his mug. The motion pulled Dazai's fingers into view once again. The fresh bandages there... Severus had thought they might have been from the shattered mirror. But the tremor in Dazai's hands and the waver in his voice...

No. Those bandages weren't covering up glass cuts, were they?

Cuts on his hands, a protective friend keeping midnight vigil, a confiscated knife, and...

Poppy's concerned warnings echoed in his head once again. *Scars,* she had said, *self-harm scars*.

Severus drew in a deep breath, then let it out as slow as he dared. When he finished, a new type of eager tension had filled out his shoulders. Carefully, he set his mug down on the desk with a small *click* of the porcelain on cold wood.

This was *another* problem that Severus clearly hadn't interfered with soon enough.

"Last night," Severus said slowly, thoughtfully, "You were up late... cutting yourself."

Dazai blinked at him, then looked away again. His shoulders were a stiff, straight arrow of tension. A billow of steam smothered his expression from view. "Whatever," he said, voice light, "I'm just letting you know, since I *do* have an alibi."

"An alibi."

When his student nodded, Severus had to bite back another sigh.

"Okay." Severus bit his lip, unsure how to proceed. He had been too quick to accuse Dazai of stealing the stone—it was blatantly obvious now. Albus was right: no mere *student* could do such a thing. Especially not one so clearly troubled as Dazai was. The realization mellowed him out and filled him with dread at the same time. Severus couldn't bring himself to admit to the mistake, and instead continued, "Mr. Zabini can confirm this?"

Dazai bristled, letting out a pained-sounding snort. "I should hope not. Any friend of mine should know how to keep a secret."

Severus frowned. "I would *hope,"* he echoed, "that your friend would know that some problems are best referred to a responsible adult."

"Like Quirrell?" Dazai asked cheekily.

"Like *myself."*

Dazai huffed, obviously displeased, and kept his eyes planted firmly on the far wall. Severus pinched the bridge of his nose before wrapping both of his hands around the mug once again. "Mr. Dazai, look at me."

Silence.

"*Problem child."*

With a heavy breath, Dazai finally tore his eyes away from the spot they had distantly locked onto. He met Severus' stare head-on for a long second, before fiddling with his mug self-consciously.

"I am..." Severus trailed off, struggling to find words soft enough to share in a situation like this. Students didn't come to *him* about things like this. He was prickly and mean—anyone could tell you that. But no one else was here to ask the hard questions. And Albus, though he may *want* to interrogate Dazai, could be so dense sometimes.

Albus often failed to consider that *this* —the wellbeing of their students—*was the bigger picture.*

"... worried about you," he finished a second later.

"I only told you that because I thought it would make you stop asking annoying questions, but I can see now this was all a huge mistake."

Severus felt sick. He took a calming sip of tea. "This wasn't a mistake. I'm glad you told me."

Dazai shuffled in his seat, and Severus sighed again.

"I've let this go on long enough. We need to talk about your... habits." Severus said it confidently, but he wasn't sure where to *start.* Hogwarts may be a fantastic place to learn magic, but the school had little to offer outside of that. Counselling, for example. Hogwarts didn't have a *counsellor.* Severus was *not* certified to provide his students therapy. The best he could do was...

"Whenever these urges to hurt yourself arise, I *need* you to seek out a professor. Preferably either myself or Madam Pomfrey."

Merlin knew that Albus couldn't provide any constructive mental-health support, what with his looming big-picture complex.

"Sure."

Dazai frowned into his tea, taking a near-silent sip of the honeyed brew. Severus watched him for a long moment. He got the feeling Dazai was merely humoring him—that this instruction would be disregarded immediately. Just like at the beginning of the year with the infirmary.

"Visit one of us," Severus reiterated, trying to get across the severity of the situation, "*for anything.* "

"Got it, Sir," Dazai replied a bit more forcefully now.

There were *other* things that Severus hadn't forgotten, either. Now, in the soft light of his office, Severus felt them come back at full force. All of those little, red flags he had been compiling seemed more desperate for attention than ever. But, against his better wishes, there *wasn't time.* The Philosopher's Stone was still missing. For now, Dazai's Red Flag collection would have to wait.

Severus held his tongue.

"Good," he said, solemn. Severus leaned back in his seat. "Then you are dismissed. Visit Poppy before returning to the library."

Dazai blinked. He shook the surprise from his face almost immediately, though. "Now? Don't you want me to call Blaise in for his interrogation?"

Severus shook his head. “Even the biggest problem child in all of Hogwarts couldn’t have breached security to this extent,” he admitted. “I see no reason to drag on the interrogation further. Unless you’re keeping information from me, brat.”

“Nope.” Dazai hummed, clearly trying to put some cheer back into his voice now that he was free to leave.

Waving him off, Severus let Dazai go. His student hurried to leave, not wasting time in making his exit.

Once the door was shut, Severus was locked in mute solitude. Steam poured out of the mugs. Severus noticed with a jolt of amusement that, despite his protests, Dazai had in fact drank most of his tea. The observation was almost immediately smothered by the sobering, lingering knowledge that Dazai wasn’t safe.

Leaning forward, Severus pressed his palms into his eyes.

Later, Severus would learn that Dazai never made it to see Poppy. There would be panic, and shouted commands, and running. There would be a student begging him to take action. Two students missing. *That damned Bigger Picture.*

But that was a panic yet to come. For now, Severus sat in his office alone. The silence was as oppressive as it was unhelpful.

Chapter End Notes

i haven't,,, written chapter 53 yet ;o; I'm hoping to have it finished within a couple weeks, maybe? we'll see ;;;
sorry about the wait,,,

thanks for reading and commenting! yall are the best ;u;

Endgame

Chapter Summary

Dazai and co. play hot potato with the Philosopher's Stone.

Content Warning for blood and violence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dazai walked through the halls, feet mute against the stone-tile floor. He felt...

No. He didn't feel anything. Feeling was gross, obviously, and he didn't do it. But if he *had* to feel something, Dazai supposed he could feel *disoriented.*

Using his self-harming habits as an excuse to get Snape off of his back had worked wonders, like he'd predicted. But it was a short-term solution and a long-term problem. The *last* thing Dazai needed was Snape bothering him even more in the future. Unfortunately, short of asserting himself as an ambassador to the Port Mafia, Dazai was otherwise out of options to halt the Philosopher's Stone investigation.

It was an uncomfortable but necessary evil. If only Snape was more like Mori or Father— *they* wouldn't have insisted on having such a probing conversation. Granted, he also would have walked away fom the encounter with quite a few unwanted injuries.

He took a deep breath as he passed by a throng of Ravenclaw students. When their eyes didn't linger on his, Dazai knew that he had succeeded in masking any residual stress from his expression. No need for worry *now*— Dazai was well in the clear! He just had to ship the Philosopher's Stone back to Mori, then skate through the rest of the year without drawing too much (more) attention to himself.

Dazai walked down the hall for another minute before he abruptly stopped. He looked around. From the tall stone walls around him to the dull-faced paintings staring him down...

"Ah," he said to no-one in particular, "I'm lost."

Someone chuckled, and Dazai's gaze shot up to a large painting hung just to his right. The light from some far-away window turned all the colors into blues and golds.

"Lost, dear?" The painting hummed. Her voice was all sorts of gentle. She was an older-looking woman, but Dazai couldn't see any indicator of the painted woman's name.

Dazai shrugged, then grinned. "Usually."

“Well,” she smiled, “where are you off to, then? Let’s see that I can’t help.”

He had left the rest of his gang in the library, hadn’t he? They were probably still there, waiting. Dazai told the painted woman as much.

She tittered out a laugh. “You’re quite a ways off from the library, dear.” Dazai sighed, but that sounded about right. “Well, we’ll see what we can do.”

Immediately, the painting began to give Dazai directions. He committed the instructions to memory as best he could, but navigating Hogwarts would *never* make sense to him. By the time the painting started talking about going up, “the rotating stairs, but only if it’s rotating counter-clockwise today, otherwise you’ll want to take the second hallway...”

Dazai stopped listening. He hated this place.

“Thanks,” Dazai said once it seemed like the painting was finally finished. “I’ll be sure to do... all that.”

“Good luck finding your friends, dear!”

Dazai raised a hand in goodbye. Then, not wanting to waste time listening to the painting’s doting voice any longer, he started down the hall once more. He was *pretty sure* this was the direction she had indicated. At the very least, it was probably some kind of progress. Dazai let out a breath and turned down a nearly identical hallway. He followed it for another five minutes before choosing a random hallway to turn down.

Dazai was about a second away from completely giving up, when a voice interrupted him.

“Dazai! Over here.”

He blinked, turning on his heels to follow the sound. Half-way down the hall and coming out of a door that Dazai hadn’t even noticed, Blaise waved a hand in hello.

“Blaise!” Dazai beamed, already making his way across the hall. “You’ll never guess what happened.”

“You got lost,” the other boy deadpanned. “I figured.”

Dazai shrugged, nonchalant. “Well, it was bound to happened, really. But I can always count on you to find me!”

Blaise’s eyes narrowed as if he were suddenly deep in thought. He brushed off the expression after a second, then began, “With Professor Snape...”

“Everything worked itself out,” Dazai said by way of answer, “We should be in the clear.”

“What did you tell him?”

Dazai waved him off. He had hardly wanted to have that conversation *once* today, let alone *twice*. Choosing to ignore the question, Dazai instead asked, “Are the others still waiting in

the library?"

Blaise frowned, but after a long second he resigned himself to the change in conversation. "They are. We were waiting for you to come back before deciding what to do now." He paused. "I think Hermione just wanted a chance to research your... *you* more."

"Of course she did."

"I take it Professor Snape isn't going to be coming around to interrogate the rest of us, then?" Blaise asked lowly.

Dazai glanced over at his friend, then hummed. "He shouldn't. I think I managed to get him off our backs." He rocked on his heels. After a moment, Blaise seemed to take that as a cue that he should start walking. Dazai followed after him. "He thinks we were together all night in the common rooms. Which means our only problem now is..."

Blaise nodded. "Professor Quirrell."

"Yup!" Dazai agreed with a small amount of cheer. "Since he's the only one who knows that we're involved, he *has* to be planning his next move." Dazai brought his hand to the small bag in his chest pocket self-consciously. It buzzed with energy. He dropped his hand to his side after a second. "Now the real question is: just how desperate is Quirrell?"

Dazai knew a thing or two about failing your mafia boss. And if his experiences were any indication, then Dazai knew Quirrell's current level of desperation was "*very."* Desperate mafiosi took desperate measures.

A group of students walked by, chattering amongst themselves and tearing Dazai from his thoughts.

Letting out a sigh, Dazai willed himself to relax. Whatever Quirrell was about to throw at them, Dazai could handle it. Desperation didn't exactly make for careful planner, after all.

As they walked, the hallway began to look more-and-more familiar to Dazai. A painting here, a room there—all things Dazai was sure that he had probably seen at some point in the past. His nose scrunched up in thought.

"Third floor?"

"Second," Blaise clarified. Then, with a slightly amused turn of his brow, he added, "We're going to the library. I know we've walked down this way before, Dazai."

The mafioso huffed. "The hallways are magic. I'm hardly to blame for not remembering any of that."

They walked in silence for a moment. It wasn't until a Gryffindor upperclassmen had turned out of the hallway, leaving it empty, that Blaise spoke again. He kept his voice low, "So."

Dazai blinked, turning to watch Blaise thoughtfully on impulse. "*So..."* he mimed, trailing off.

Blaise merely rolled his eyes. “*So,* we have the stone, but we’re hardly finished with this job. What’s the endgame, Dazai?”

The endgame. Right.

Dazai swayed on his feet while they walked, rolling the idea in his head with some level of due caution. *Endgame* was shipping the Philosopher’s Stone home on Featherbrain’s wings and into Mori’s hand. And regardless of what Dazai had led the twins o believe, endgame *wasn't* laughingly returning the stone to Dumbledore, a “*got you!”* light on their lips. No. Endgame was...

“I don’t know,” he replied honestly, “maybe we’ll get Quirrell arrested.”

Blaise raised a brow.

“For whatever scheme he’s concocting right now,” Dazai hummed. “Don’t you trust me?”

“Sure.” Blaise’s eyes fell to Dazai’s cloak where he knew the Philosopher's Stone was tucked away, then flicked back to his face. “That doesn’t mean I don’t know you have some sort of ulterior motive, though. I’ve known you all year, Dazai. I *know* there’s a plan and I know I probably won’t approve of it. At the very least, I can trust in that.”

Tilting his head, Dazai let the observations slip by uncontested. “I wouldn’t expect any less, Second in Command.”

“The endgame—”

“Will work itself out,” Dazai finished, “Promise. Quirrell doesn’t have many moves left. And the fact that he can’t use magic on me limits him even more. The endgame is,” Dazai raised a finger in point, “Quirrell comes to us.”

“And then?”

“*And then,* we make him regret it.” He hummed. “Honestly, I’m a little interested to see what he thinks he’s going to do now.”

As long as Professor Quirrell waited just one more day—long enough for Dazai to smuggle the stone out of Hogwarts—then everything would be fine. Everything—

“Mr. Dazai.”

He stopped abruptly in his tracks. Was *everyone* going to just keep pulling him aside all day? Dazai let out an annoyed breath, then rolled on his heels to see who was looking for him now.

That annoyance immediately shuttered into cold caution.

“Professor Quirrell,” Dazai beamed, “Good to see you.”

Of course, Dazai thought bitterly. He carefully angled his body so the stone in his pocket was faced away from Quirrell's prying eyes.

The turban-wearing professor was only a few feet behind them. The fact that Dazai hadn't heard the man's approach bristled at his nerves. Quirrell looked only moderately disheveled by his own standards. His eyes were dark, piercing things. Dazai tensed up without really noticing.

Smiling coldly, Quirrell took a step closer. Blaise reached a hand out into Dazai's and bodily dragged him a step away from the professor. In response, Quirrell looked vaguely amused.

"W-we should talk, Mr. Dazai."

Dazai felt his eyes narrow, but rather than dwelling on that dark feeling long, he let a long grin split his face. "I would think so," he said simply. The pounding buzz of the Philosopher's Stone on his chest continued. Dazai did his level best to ignore it.

"*Boss,"* Blaise warned in a low voice.

Dazai shrugged the other boy off, attention fully on Professor Quirrell now. "After you cancelled our magic lessons, it really bummed me out," he said, "It's nice to see that I have your attention again."

Quirrell's brow twitched.

Tilting his chin up, Dazai addressed Blaise. The other boy was still poised protectively in front of him. "Why don't you go check on the gang, Blaise? I'm sure they're wondering what's taking us so long to get back. I'll hang back and have a conversation with Professor Quirrell, here."

When Blaise didn't look overly convinced, Dazai stepped forward so that he was between his subordinate and Quirrell. Making sure to angle his body away from Quirrell, Dazai carefully lifted his cloak open. Blaise's eyes immediately snapped down to the small, silk bag—where the Philosopher's Stone was currently hiding.

Slowly so as to not be noticed, Blaise took the bag and tucked it underneath his own cloak. He nodded.

"Sure. I trust you, Boss."

Dazai grinned, then patted Blaise on the shoulder to cover up the boy's movements. Once the swap was complete, Dazai whirled on his heels back to Quirrell. "*Subordinates,"* he complained. "You know how they are. Always worrying."

"...ah." Quirrell blinked. "Is that r-right?"

Dazai nodded, mostly to himself, then dismissed Blaise with a wave of his hand. Behind him, the boy only hesitated a second before hurrying down the hall and out of sight. Dazai let go of a breath he'd been unknowingly holding. Now that Blaise and the stone were safe...

“A gang, hm?” Quirrell cut in, voice eerily light.

Dazai merely smirked in return. “I like to use my resources.”

In response, Quirrell’s expression sharpened. It wasn’t quite a smile, but it wasn’t exactly a scowl, either. Reaching out, Quirrell placed his hand on Dazai’s shoulder. A shiver ran through Dazai unwittingly, but he managed to disguise most of his discomfort. “Let’s talk in my office, shall we?”

Dazai blinked, and Quirrell spun him around. With the professor’s fingers digging into his shoulders, Dazai was more-or-less pushed down the hall.

With a start, Dazai realized what was so off-putting about Quirrell’s light tone: *he wasn’t stuttering anymore.*

Dazai let out a breath—it seemed the fun-and-games were over, now. It was time to get serious. Whatever "*endgame"* meant, this was it.

“Lead the way, Sir.”

“You need to teach him a lesson, Draco! The other Slytherins will do whatever you say. Just tell them to beat Dazai up, or something. That’ll teach him to disrespect you, sitting at the Gryffindor table like that!”

Draco hummed, contemplating Pansy’s growling words for only a second before replying, “No.”

Pansy huffed. She kicked the hallway wall before leaning up against it. “Is this because he saved your life on Halloween?” She sneered. “That was *ages* ago. Besides, he probably saved you on accident.”

Draco shot her a frowning look. Then, without fanfare, he fell against the wall beside Pansy and let out a peeved breath. “Maybe...”

Perking up, Pansy smirked. “You know, I think you’re the only Slytherin still humoring that mudblood.”

“As a Malfoy, I *naturally* have to go the extra mile,” he said, sticking out his chest, “But I suppose I can see your point. Before we can rehabilitate that poor mudblood, the other Slytherins will have to learn to tolerate him.”

“That isn’t at all what I meant,” Pansy said with a scowl. “You’re too tolerant of his nonsense, Draco.”

Draco opened his mouth to respond, but before he could, something caught his eye. Hurrying down the hall, an uncharacteristic worry between his brows, Blaise didn't seem to notice them.

"Where's he off to in such a rush?" Pansy asked disinterestedly. "More Dazai trouble, I bet."

Blaise's eyes were focused on the long end of the corridor, clearly dead-set on achieving some goal. Something dark bubbled up in Draco's stomach, and he was calling out, "Blaise!" before giving it a second thought.

The other boy stopped dead in his tracks. There was a wide-eyed look in his eyes when Blaise turned to face them. Upon seeing it was Draco that had called to him, Blaise's expression closed off to something more neutral. There was still a hint of panic, but it was mostly smothered, now.

"Draco. Pansy." Blaise greeted, voice somewhat breathless.

"In a hurry?" Draco raised a brow and grinned.

"Yes, actually."

Draco blinked. He pushed off of the wall and crossed the hall to stare Blaise down. He squinted, as if searching for the reason Blaise was in such a rush. Pansy followed behind half a step, a bored-looking frown on her face.

"Dazai isn't with you," Draco said after a second when it became clear Blaise wasn't going to continue. "He's not lost, is he?"

Pansy scoffed and rolled her eyes, but Draco kept his focus on Blaise. There was an odd, wet worry bubbling up in his chest. Blaise *really* wasn't one to look panicked. Concerned*,* sure. But outright *panicked?*

Something wasn't right!

Draco's eyes narrowed. Some of his characteristic *Malfoy Menace* slipped into his expression, tightening a demanding hold on the other boy. "What's wrong?"

"Oh," Blaise's lips parted, then fell shut. He looked to Pansy, then back to Draco. After a too-long moment, he finally gave in. "Dazai is... doing something reckless again."

"Unsurprising," Draco said dully, masking any of his own concern with distaste. "What's my subordinate done now?"

Blaise frowned. He looked to be struggling to find the right words to describe the situation. Unbidden, Draco thought, *Merlin's Beard! What have you done now, Dazai?!* It must have really been something big, to change the usually stoic expression on Blaise's face like this.

"He's with Professor Quirrell."

Draco frowned. The worry biting at him was at once replaced by confusion. Pansy seemed to agree.

“So what?” She snapped. “They’re back to doing their stupid lessons again.”

“Not lessons,” Blaise corrected. He kept his gaze on Draco, looking contemplative.

Draco glowered. “What.”

“Nothing. Just thinking if I could...” he trailed off, then shook his head, “...if *Dazai* could trust you.”

“Of course he can.” Draco felt his brows pinch together. Unexpected betrayal burned in his gut.

Blaise tilted his head, seeming to easily read Draco’s childish hurt. “That’s not an insult. Dazai doesn’t even really trust *me,* you know.”

Draco opened his mouth to object, but Blaise wore a certain expression. He was confident in that assessment of Dazai’s character. Ignoring that trail of thought, Draco steered the conversation. “Then what’s got you in such a fuss, Blaise?”

“Did Dazai do something to Professor Quirrell?” Pansy asked suddenly, perking up at Draco’s side.

At the question, something uncertain pooled in Draco’s stomach. Slowly, he asked, “Did Professor Quirrell do something to Dazai?”

It was quiet for a moment—too long a moment—as Blaise seemed to collect his thoughts. Finally, Blaise shook his head *no.* Draco let out a breath, feeling that aimless weight lift off of him. But the relief wasn’t long-lived.

“Professor Quirrell hasn’t done anything,” Blaise finished heavily. “Not yet.”

Draco didn’t know what sort of expression he made after hearing that, but it must have been significant. Not a second later, and Blaise was hastily tacking on, “I was just on my way to find a professor. Or the twins.”

“The *twins?”* Pansy sneered.

“They’re older and Dazai likes them,” was all Blaise said by way of answer.

Draco allowed the half-answer, if only because he was quickly realizing that today’s Dazai Problem might actually be a bit out of their control. Just like all the other times when the other Slytherin got sick, or passed out, or made a poison instead of a potion.

“Seriously, Blaise,” Draco said, voice carefully serious, “What has Dazai gotten himself into now? Do I need to write my father about some sort of infraction on Quirrell’s part?”

Blaise seemed to toss the idea around for a second. “Probably.”

"*Probably?"* Pansy mimicked, standing up straighter.

"He's..." again, Blaise considered his words thoughtfully. What he finally settled on left Draco's mouth falling open in stupefaction. "...In the wizard mafia."

Draco blinked once, then twice, as if doing so would make sense of Blaise's justification.

Pansy immediately cut in, her voice no more than a growl. "Is this about that mudblood's stupid mafia theory, again? I can't believe you're buying that, Blaise. You're meant to be the reasonable one!"

"Hey!" Draco huffed.

Blaise shrugged, nonplussed.

Shaking himself, Draco narrowed his gaze on Blaise. "Seriously, Blaise. Should I be worried?"

Something hardening in his eyes, Blaise leveled Draco with a heavy stare. "Yes," he said the word easily, as though hearing the usually uncaring Blaise admit to such a thing wasn't revolutionary. Draco just barely heard Blaise mumble to himself, "I shouldn't have left Dazai alone."

Draco opened his mouth to voice his concern, but before he could, Blaise continued.

Gaining traction, he nodded. "I don't trust this situation. Professor Quirrell is trying to isolate Dazai. I think he's going to do something bad, if a professor doesn't get there soon." His brow furrowed. Blaise blinked, apparently solidifying his convictions rather abruptly. "Draco, Pansy. Go get Professor Snape and tell them about this."

Pansy gawped. Draco recovered from the sudden command much quicker.

"*I'm* the boss, so I make the orders," he countered, uncertain.

"I thought *you* were getting a professor."

Blaise waved them off. When the movement started to shake his cloak, Blaise seemed to think better of it and dropped his hand to his side. "I have a bad feeling," he clarified after a second.

Pansy glowered, but didn't interrupt this time. She seemed to really be considering Blaise's words now—probably fueled on by his serious demeanor.

"If it's that serious," Draco said, voice careful and slow, "I'll just contact my father—"

Blaise was shaking his head before Draco started. "It would be too late, then." Straightening up, Blaise reached into his cloak. He pulled out a small blue bag. Draco didn't recognize it, but Blaise held the silk cloth with a sort of reverence.

Draco raised a brow when Blaise didn't immediately open the bag.

“What’s in this bag...” Blaise said, haltingly, “is what Professor Quirrell wants from Dazai.”

Pansy perked up. She reached out to take the pouch, but Blaise swiped it away from her at the last second. “What’s in that thing?”

Draco seconded the motion. This bag and its contents—they stung. His subordinate and his good friend, keeping a secret from him? And clearly a big one, at that. Draco bristled. He glared at the bag as if it would apologize for his selfish friends.

“I won’t tell you,” Blaise answered shortly. He ignored Pansy’s affronted bark. “Dazai wouldn’t want me to. He’s weird about letting you in our gang.”

“Weird—” Draco cut off, mouth dropping open as the words rolled over him. “Wait. *Gang?!”*

Blaise merely nodded. “If I give you this bag,” he held it close to his chest protectively, “and you don’t open it until Dazai is safe, then I’ll let you into the gang.”

Draco sputtered.

“Think of it as your initiation. Since I’m second in command, I can do things like that. Probably.”

Reeling, Draco took a step back. “Do you two just always have your own little adventures going on?”

Seeming to take that as an answer, Blaise carefully extended the silk bag forward. Draco hesitated only a second before moving to take it. His curiosity—and desire to be in-the-know winning out quickly. That, and a warm, worried feeling bubbling up in his chest. “Don’t open it,” he repeated.

“*Don’t,”* Blaise nodded. Then, “Go and get Professor Snape. And don’t give him the bag, either.”

“Where are you in all of this?”

Blaise glanced to Pansy when she spoke, then took a step back in the direction he came from. “I’m going back for Dazai.”

“He can take care of himself,” Pansy said, slowly.

“He really, *really* can’t.”

Pansy bit her lip. “Blaise. Just because that mudblood is doing something risky and stupid, doesn’t mean you should, too.”

Blaise shook his head and took another step. Then, he offered Pansy a small smile. “Someone has to babysit him.” He turned to Draco, who was clutching the bag in his hand and repeated, “Professor Snape. Now.”

Draco felt like he should be objecting to being bossed around, but the words died on his tongue. Blaise wore a grave seriousness about himself. And, against all odds, Draco found himself nodding.

“Oh, and Draco?” Blaise asked, whirling on his toes. “Welcome to the gang.”

Draco and Pansy stared at Blaise’s back until the boy disappeared around a corner. Clutching at the bag in his hands, Draco grounded himself once more. Pansy’s voice came from over his shoulder.

“You can’t just let Blaise boss you around like that, Draco. I told you that Dazai was only going to be trouble, corrupting Blaise like this.”

The bag wore an odd weight in his hold. Draco looked down at it, frowning and tense. The bag itself was quite small, but whatever was inside it was even slighter. A small, marble-like object rolled within. Draco narrowed his eyes.

“So?” Pansy asked, “Open it up. I want to see what those two are keeping from us.”

Draco considered it, pinching the bag between his fingers. With a frown on his face, Draco finally turned to Pansy. “No.”

“*No?!”*

“ Not now,” Draco said after a second. He tucked the bag into his cloak just as Blaise must have done earlier. “We’re getting Professor Snape first.”

Pansy crossed her arms. “You seriously believe him about that Professor Quirrell nonsense?”

Rather than responding, Draco promptly turned on his heel. He started down the hall in the direction of Professor Snape’s office, a contemplative set to his face. After a moment, Pansy scoffed. She ran to catch up not a second later.

“You *can’t* be serious,” she said, hurrying to keep pace.

“Blaise seemed upset.” Draco tuned down a hall. By now, Hogwarts was as familiar to him as his own mansion was. “Blaise *never* seems upset.”

“Unless its about Dazai.”

Draco nodded. “And Dazai is always in trouble.” He remembered visiting the other Slytherin in the infirmary multiple times, a deep furrow to his brow. “Besides, we Slytherins have to stick together.”

“He’s a mudblood,” Pansy growled.

“He’s in our club.”

Pansy stared at him, mouth slightly parted. Then, resigned, she turned away. There was a red flush to her cheeks—whether it was embarrassed or angry was anyone’s guess. Either way,

she didn't comment again on the mysterious bag that Blaise had given Draco. Nor did she make another remark about Draco's sudden willingness to let Blaise boss him around.

It wasn't until they were coming down the dungeon hall that Pansy spoke again. "I saw Professor Snape down here earlier. He's probably in his office still."

Draco nodded his thanks. When they reached the office door, Draco swung it open without knocking. It smacked against the wall loudly.

Snape's head shot up from the papers on his desk, his hand twitching for his wand. Once his eyes settled on Draco and Pansy, however, his wide-eyed expression dropped into a scathing glare. The corners of his mouth pinched into a deep frown.

"Mr. Malfoy, Ms. Parkinson." Snape's voice was just above a growl. "You must want a detention, barging in like this."

"Sir—" Pansy started.

"Dazai and Blaise are in trouble."

At Draco's declaration, Snape's mouth immediately snapped shut. He was standing from his desk and crossing the room within the second. Immediately, Snape had shifted from rightfully infuriated to cold and serious. "What's going on?"

"Dazai and Professor Quirrell went off together somewhere," Draco explained. "Blaise went after them. He seems to think Dazai's in some sort of danger."

At his side, Draco felt Pansy shoot him a questioning look. Her eyes only widened further when Snape went pale.

"When was this?"

"Blaise disappeared a few minutes ago. I don't know when Dazai left." When Snape didn't immediately take to action (wearing a thoughtful, brow-furrowed expression and a white-knuckled grip on his wand), Draco continued, "You have to help them. If you don't I'll tell my father!"

Snape turned. He leveled Draco with a harsh stare. "I have shown you and your friends *great* lenience in the past, Mr. Malfoy. Do not presume that means you can order me around."

Draco didn't back down. Pansy looked between the two, a question on her lips.

Thankfully, the rising tension in the room didn't last long.

Professor Snape quickly commandeered the conversation, abruptly breaking their staring contest for more significant matters. "We will speak later." When Draco nodded jerkily, he asked, "Where did they go?"

The hint of panic in Snape's voice was both reassuring and terrifying. Reassuring—Draco hadn't made a mistake in running here. And terrifying—his friends were in *real danger.*

But this *was* Dazai they were talking about. The severity of today's events... Draco frowned. He shouldn't have been surprised that Dazai was deep into trouble. But somehow there was still a kernel of concern tearing at his chest.

Looking at Snape now, Draco thought his professor was probably thinking something very similar, in his own way.

"I don't know," Draco told him. "Blaise didn't say."

Snape worried his lip, clearly deep in thought and more concerned than was typical for the demanding professor. After a second, Snape crossed the last distance between them. He dropped a hand onto one of Pansy's and Draco's shoulders. He stared them each in the eye. "Dumbledore should be in his office at this hour—the password to get in is *Lemon-Poppyseed."* Snape waited until they both nodded to continue. "Go and find him straight away."

Draco's mouth was a thin line. "Where are you going?"

"After Mr. Dazai and Mr. Zabini. Do *not* follow me."

Pansy shook her head, still looking a little shell-shocked. Beside her, Draco said, "Yes, Sir."

Whether he was content with that response or just out of time, Snape nodded and dropped his grip on their shoulders. Not even a second later, the potions maste pushed past them and to the door. He swung it open and sprinted from the room without even looking back, a warning whisper of, "*Problem child, what have you done now?"* on his lips.

Pansy and Draco watched him disappear. They stood in silence for another long moment, surprised with the fervor with which Snape had acted. Finally, Pansy walked to the door and peeked around the hall.

"He babies Dazai too much," she said, but her voice was shaky and uncertain now.

Draco didn't respond, the severity of the situation gluing his mouth shut. Dazai and Blaise were in deep, *deep* trouble. Something only the Headmaster could solve. And it all revolved around...

Slowly, Draco removed the blue silk bag from his cloak. Despite its size, it had never weighed more than it did now. He took a deep breath. Then, with careful fingers, he pried the bag open and peered inside.

A crimson glow lit his vision.

"Draco!" Pansy called, jarring Draco from his thoughts. "Are we going to get the headmaster, or not?"

Draco took a deep, steadying breath and pinched the bag shut. Only when it was safely tucked in his cloak once more, did Draco turn to face Pansy. One side of his grin quirked up, as condescending as ever.

“Of *course* we’re going to get Dumbledore. If we don’t save our idiots, who will?” But even as he said it, Draco couldn’t help but to wince at the ancient weight now hidden within his cloak.

The door shut behind Dazai—a snap of wood on stone. Quirrell’s footsteps echoed behind him, making their way across the room until the man was just a foot at Dazai’s back.

Dazai willed himself to relax. Quirrell had a way of easily putting him on edge, often through a liberal use of touch. But as long as the Philosopher’s Stone was safely in Blaise’s hold, Dazai could put up with unease and discomfort. Mori would get the stone, and everything would work out. Only once he was certain that the expression on his face was under control did Dazai turn on his heels. He smiled pleasantly at Quirrell.

The professor merely stared back. Now that they were alone, his shaky demeanor had all but vanished. All that remained now was a steely cold expression. It was a look that Dazai had been seeing glimpses of all year. But now, unmasked completely, Quirrell let his dangerous aura loose.

Dazai let his eyes narrow and his smile stretch into something sharp and fox-like. “Your plan, Sir?”

Quirrell frowned, then shook his head. His fingers twitched at his sides. Occasionally, a hand would move towards the cloth of his turban before falling back to rest without doing anything. Dazai watched the motion with a detached sort of interest.

“What makes you think I have a plan, I wonder.”

Dazai raised a brow.

Seeming a bit amused, Quirrell offered a strained smile. “I had underestimated how clever you are. To think that I was so invested in my own plots I neglected to consider you had the conscientiousness to complete your own. Ah...” Quirrell stared down at Dazai, an oddly pleased expression on his face, “...What a horrifying child you are.”

Rolling back on his heels, Dazai chuckled. “And to think the Big Bad Quirrell was bested by said child. How embarrassing for you.”

The obvious irritation that flickered across Quirrell’s face was short-lived. It was replaced almost immediately by another cold mask. Seeing the professor switch from one character to the next—a nervous wreck to a low-level mafioso to a calculating enemy—Dazai tried to pin down just what sort of opponent he was really facing down.

“So clearly lacking in all the necessary information. Yet you still managed to steal the Philosopher’s Stone.” He frowned. “Horrifying indeed,” Quirrell finished, apparently

choosing to ignore Dazai's rebuttal altogether. "But a child, nonetheless. Tell me, child—what made you take interest in the stone?"

"Well," Dazai hummed, feigning thoughtfulness, "It seemed like fun, at the time. Not to mention that *you* clearly wanted it."

Quirrell blinked. His eyes narrowed, and he watched Dazai for a short, contemplative moment. Dazai made sure to keep his expression flat under the close scrutiny. Whatever Quirrell saw, it seemed to harden some resolve in him. After another second of tense silence, Quirrell abruptly asked, "We first met at The Leaky Cauldron, do you remember?"

Dazai frowned at the non sequiter, but didn't object. He was too curious to see where Quirrell was going with this new line of inquiry. Dazai didn't like having information dangled over his head.

Recalling the incident, Dazai gave Quirrell a thumbs-up—just as he had on that day.

That had been the first time Dazai saw Quirrell. The other man immediately gave him the impression of danger. But it wasn't until much later during the year that Dazai truly began to involve himself with the turban-wearing mafioso—spurred on by interest for the situation a strong dislike for the suspicious dark arts professor. Regardless...

Quirrell nodded, looking pleased. "You picked me out of the crowd," he explained, "and I picked you out, as well. What was it, I wonder, that drew you to me?"

Dazai raised a brow and held his tongue. His silence was rewarded when a second later, Quirrell explained.

"I suppose it doesn't matter now. As for me... We—*I* noticed that there was something... unique about you." Quirrell leaned froward, his breath brushing Dazai's bangs hotly into his face. He didn't relent, despite the obvious discomfort now pasted across Dazai's face. "A strange aura surrounding you... it's impossible to put it into words just what it is. Even now, it hangs around you. Eats away at the air. Seeing you then, in the pub, the oddest sensation came over me. Do you know what that was?"

When Dazai didn't respond except to shift back a step, Quirrell said, "*Terror.* I was overcome with the feeling that what I was looking at was not human at all. An anomaly sent to slither through the cracks of magical society. A monster."

Dazai blinked.

Cold dread slipped down his spine and Quirrell's words sunk into his brain.

An *aura?* The only other person who had ever mentioned Dazai having a strange air about him was the Bloody Baron, wasn't it? As a ghost, the man could naturally sense No Longer Human. But Quirrell shouldn't have been able to sense it, let alone identify some of its characeristics.

And even then, what Quirrell was saying...

“Hmm... I see you know what aura I'm talking about,” Quirrell said, watching his expression closely. Dazai quickly schooled his features into a blank mask. “How curious.” He shook his head. “Initially, that horrible aura is what drew me to you. However, it wasn’t until some time later that I knew...”

“Knew?” Dazai echoed. He tried to take another step away, but immediately backed into a desk. It rattled against the stone floor.

Quirrell’s smile arched into something sharper. Slowly, he explained, “Imagine my surprise to find young Dazai Osamu’s aura could slay a mountain troll with one touch.” He continued to speak, ignoring the dawning realization crossing Dazai’s face. “On Halloween night, you’ll recall. Just moments before I could break into the chamber guarded by that three-headed dog, you kill my distraction. I knew immediately that even should I succeed in stealing the stone, I must also steal *you* as well. The power you possess is incredible—whatever it may be.”

Dazai worried the inside of his mouth. “You want to kidnap me?” He asked, voice carefully blank. He was torn between amusement and caution. If Quirrell had seen No Longer Human kill the mountain troll on Halloween...

“No, no. I want to *recruit* you.”

This is a recruitment pitch? Dazai’s eyes narrowed.

Taking a deep breath, Dazai steadied himself.

No. After all, he currently held all the cards. Dazai had the Philosopher’s Stone. He had No Longer Human—a nullification aura Quirrell was evidentially more aware of than he should be. He had more protection from Hogwarts than Quirrell could ever have...

It’s not a recruitment, it’s a cheap gamble against an unexpectedly competent opponent!

“ The Death Eaters would love to have you,” Quirrell said. “Although I suppose if you won’t let me *recruit* you, *kidnapping*— as you so eloquently put it—wouldn't be an entirely incorrect word.”

Dazai lifted his chin in thought, letting the words wash over him. *Death Eaters...* he had heard the name a few times here and there. His research had turned up that it was an old, washed-up terrorist organization. A pure-blood supremacy group lead by some villianous guy that was destroyed in the recent wizarding war. If that group was still active, the Port Mafia would want to know.

Speaking of the mafia...

“You can’t *have* me,” Dazai argued carefully, “I’m already owned.”

“Hogwarts cannot guide you the way the Death Eaters can—”

“Not Hogwarts.” Dazai waved him off. He stood up straighter, being sure to not shove the desk this time. “If you want to recruit me, take it up with my Boss first.”

Quirrell frowned. For the first time today, he seemed genuinely surprised by what Dazai had to say. He was silent, eyes searching over Dazai once again. Whatever evidence he was looking for this time, he clearly didn't find. There was a tight pinch to his brow when Quirrell met Dazai's eyes once again.

Dazai held the gaze, steady.

"Oh?" Quirrell said tonelessly. Then, "I see."

"Neither of us has all of that *necessary information* you were talking about, huh?" Dazai asked lightly. When Quirrell's expression only darkened, he tacked on, "Well, I guess *I* do now. So that leaves you... what? No information and no Philosopher's Stone. I know *my boss* wouldn't be pleased with an outcome like that."

Quirrell grit his teeth. For a moment, Dazai thought the man would start shouting. But when Quirrell spoke, his tone was hollow and frigid. "You're nearly right."

A frown worked its way across Dazai's face as he watched Quirrell's hands move. One hand rose to his turban, and the other to his wand.

"However, you neglect to consider that my mission is not yet complete," Quirrell raised his wand until the tip was poking into Dazai's chest. "If you will not willingly give it to me, then I will be forced to take it myself."

Dazai stilled, but held his ground. Whatever spell Quirrell had poised in his wand would die out the second it reached him. There was no danger here—

"All this talk about *your* boss..." Quirrell gripped at the edge of his turban with white-knuckled fingers. Then, in one jerking motion, he ripped it from his head and sent it collapsing to the ground. "Perhaps it's time for you to meet *mine."*

Quirrell stared down at him, a certain kind of gleam in his eyes. But Dazai's attention was focused elsewhere. Eyes wide, Dazai stumbled back another step. He pressed up into the desk and braced against the surface with flat palms.

Slowly, Quirrell began to turn around. It wasn't until his back was facing Dazai that he finally stopped.

On the back of Quirrell's head was *another face.*

Dazai's mouth dropped open unwittingly. The other face seemed to be its own entity entirely —smiling a sharp, cruel smile. It stared down at him through slim and wrinkled eyes and wore pasty white skin. Dazai noted with some surprise that the face, stretched over the back of Quirrell's head as it was, did not have a nose.

"I have been waiting to meet you, dear boy," the face spoke with a lisping, creaking voice.

With a start, Dazai realized that he didn't sense any more magic than usual coming from Quirrell now. Which meant either that face *wasn't* magical, or…

Or I have no idea what's going on here!

Dazai immediately dropped the shutters down on his expression, covering up any of the revelations currently overcoming him. If what Quirrell said was to be believed, then he was currently talking to the *boss of the Death Eaters.* He couldn't afford to look weak—not now that he being forced into the role of ambassador to the Port Mafia.

Regardless, the face seemed to notice what Dazai was doing, as it made a small, amused sound. Dazai tensed, but held his challenging gaze.

"I'm afraid I can't say the same," Dazai said, tilting his head, "seeing as I haven't the faintest idea who you are."

Even if I'm in danger right now, I need to gather more information before running off for safety.

"No?" The face asked.

Quirrell cleared his throat, suddenly jumping in with a nervous, "My Lord, the boy *is* only a muggleborn."

In response, the face seemed to concede the point. A mild look of annoyance passed over its expression, but it was replaced almost instantly by something less demanding. "Of course," it said, haltingly. "Unfortunate."

Dazai didn't let any discomfort at the assessment show on his face. As it was, he was already used to the casual pureblood supremacy from the rest of Slytherin house—with only Blaise being the real exception. Instead, Dazai merely leveled the face with a blank stare.

It stared back, gaze condescending, before finally saying, "My name is feared amongst all of this impure wizard society. Many shake in terror at just hearing it spoken aloud. As such, weak-minded wizards have taken to referring to me only as *You-Know-Who.* "

You-Know-Who... Dazai had seen that name in passing, during his research. Another very *past-tense* concern for wizard society. Every report he found with that moniker had been so inflated with hysteria that Dazai had mostly disregarded the information.

"You sure have a lot of people afraid of you, then," he replied off-hand.

You-Know-Who seemed to smile at that. Taking pleasure in the other's fear... what a mafioso thing to do. Dazai was certainly familiar with the type. Still, Dazai couldn't help but to narrow his eyes suspiciously when the face's morphed features stretched into a sharp smile.

"But seeing as we will shortly be joining sides," You-Know-Who decided, "you will call me Lord Voldemort."

Dazai frowned, then lifted his chin back. "Aren't you listening? I'm not joining your little terrorist group."

He already had his loyalties, after all.

Annoyance passed over Voldemort's face, only to be replaced by a scathing anger a second later. "This is not a request."

"It should be," Dazai countered. "And I'm refusing."

"You don't *refuse* the Dark Lord!" Quirrell gasped, fingers clenching at his sides. The wand in his hand stayed poised, as if ready at any second to swing around and shoot off an attack spell.

"You don't refuse the boss of the Port Mafia, either. So I guess we're at an impasse."

Voldemort blinked and Quirrell's hands ceased their fidgeting.

Dazai kept his gaze locked onto Voldemort's, searching for—

That flicker of recognition in the man's eyes. Voldemort recognized the Port Mafia.

Interesting, Dazai thought, immediately followed by, *Just what kind of game is Mori really playing?*

"The Port Mafia." Voldemort's voice was blank and entirely impossible to discern. "If that is the case, then I suppose there is no convincing you."

Dazai went stiff at the finality in Voldemort's words.

"Give me the Philosopher's Stone."

"No thanks," Dazai replied as casually as he could manage, raising his arms in a loose shrug. His mind was still reeling from the implications of what Voldemort had said. "Besides, the Philosopher's Stone is Port Mafia property now."

Voldemort scowled. "Then..." seeming to take some unspoken cue, Quirrell began to turn around. His wand once again pressed tightly into Dazai's chest. "...Quirrell. Kill the boy. Make sure his Port Mafia gets this message: *The Dark Lord is not to be challenged."*

" Yes, my lord," Quirrell said. Before Dazai could even think about running away, Quirrell jabbed the end of his wand harder into Dazai's chest with enough force that it would surely bruise. "*Avada Kedavra!"*

The very second Quirrell chanted the spell, Dazai felt a swell of powerful dark magic burst to life at the end of the man's wand. A sharp, green light spilled out from its peak. The energy was dark and biting—so overwhelming that just being near it momentarily stole Dazai's breath away.

But the wand was stabbed into Dazai's chest, and No Longer Human was faster than any spell could ever be. Just as the magic was starting to take form, Dazai's ability devoured it.

Quirrell's eyes flew open. Shock drew his expression into stark relief.

Using the momentary lapse in concentration to his advantage, Dazai smacked Quirrell's wand off his chest. He dashed across the room, only stumbling slightly when a headache pounded behind his eyes unexpectedly.

"Catch him!"

"I-I'm trying, my lord!"

Dazai reached the door, but stopped just short of grabbing the handle. No. He couldn't leave yet! This was the *perfect* opportunity to gather information about the Death Eaters—and about the real reason Mori sent him here all those months ago. Dazai whirled on his feet to face the professor and Voldemort both. Quirrell was staring at him, eyes wide and wand outstretched.

"How did you do that?" Quirrell asked, wand hand steady. A flicker of magical energy at the tip of his wand told Dazai the man was preparing another spell. He recognized the magic signature as the *Avada Kedavra* spell Quirrell had attempted just seconds before.

Dazai wasn't familiar with that spell's name. But judging by the oppressive energy it gave off, Dazai was willing to bet he would find information on it only in the library's restricted section.

"Spit it out, boy!"

Dazai raised his hands in a placating manner, subtly withdrawing his wand from the sleeve of his coat with the movement. He hid it behind his thumb. "I don't know what you're talking about, Sir."

"The killing curse!" Quirrell howled. "How did you stop it?"

"Oh." Dazai blinked. "A killing curse? Really?"

"Answer me, boy!"

Dazai stared back, blank.

The longer Dazai stayed silent for the more infuriated Quirrell and Voldemort seemed to become. After another second passed, Quirrell's grip on his wand tightened until his knuckles were bleached white.

"Since you will not answer now," Voldemort's voice hissed from the other side of Quirrell's head, "I will be forced to pry the answers from you." Dazai watched with tense shoulders as Voldemort spit out demands. "Quirrell! Knock the boy out. We will force the information and stone out of him once we have escaped Hogwarts!"

Quirrell immediately sprang into action, the "yes, my lord" spraying from his lips without hesitation. He jerked his wand forward. *"Stupefy!"*

Noxious magic burst out from Quirrell's wand. Dazai held his ground, steadfast in his plot to let No Longer Human nullify the magic. He flinched harshly as the magic beam shot out to

him. Its aura was sick and dizzying even from a distance.

"*No!"*

Dazai's eyes shot open as something—*someone*— abruptly slammed into his back.

Dazai went careening forward several feet before regaining his balance against a desk chair. Quickly, his head snapped up to see what had knocked him out of the stupefy blast. His mouth dropped open.

"*Blaise?!"*

The other Slytherin boy, now stood where Dazai had been seconds before, was knocked back by the red beam of magic. The second it smacked into his chest, Blaise's eyes rolled into the back of his head. His knees gave out not a moment later. Blaise crumpled to the floor in a heap and his head smacked loudly against the floor.

"I didn't see him come in—" Quirrell stop-started.

Dazai's eyes widened when he saw a small pool of blood forming around his friend's unconscious head.

Blaise sacrificed himself... for me?

"Forget about that one!" Voldemort's voice shocked Dazai from his stunned stupor. "Get the boy! Get Dazai Osamu—he's the only one I want!"

Dazai's neck snapped up just in time to see Quirrell raising his wand once more. Thinking about Blaise, passed out on the stone floor a foot behind him, Dazai leveled Quirrell with a scathing glare and took the spell head-on.

The red light smacked into his face, but dissipated in a cloud of smoke before truly taking effect. Dazai forced himself to ignore the nauseousness now roiling in his stomach and the headache spiking behind his brow.

Once his vision cleared, Dazai saw Quirrell watching him with that aghast expression again. The man stumbled back half-a-step before coming back to himself and trying again.
"*Stupefy!"*

" Don't," Dazai growled, barely reacting to the sudden urge to vomit as No Longer Human nullified one more, then three more angry spells, "hurt my subordinate."

"*St-stupefy!"*

Dazai took a shaky step forward, then another more steady one. Spell after spell slammed into him. No Longer Human responded in kind until Dazai could feel his own begging unconsciousness growing nearer. "And don't ever," he raised his own wand, "attack my *friend!"*

Dazai opened his mouth to cast a spell, *incendio* burning on his tongue and ready to strike.

Quirrell must have seen the livid intention in Dazai's eyes. He growled, flinging his useless wand to the air and letting it clatter obnoxiously against the floor somewhere else. Hands free, Quirrell launched himself straight at Dazai. They fell to the floor in a heap. Quirrell towered over Dazai. His fingers bony and red locked around Dazai's throat and *squeezed.*

Dazai's vision immediately wavered, then went black around the edges. He sucked in a gasping breath. As blood rushed to Dazai's head, everything began to go fuzzy. Numbly, Dazai dropped his wand. It rolled away a short distance before coming to an abrupt halt. With nothing stopping him any longer, Quirrell moved so that his entire weight was pressing down on to Dazai's smaller body. A knee stabbed into his chest. Dazai tried fruitlessly to suck in oxygen, only to fight a raspy shiver instead.

Reflexively, Dazai threw his numb arms out.

For a second, everything went still.

That numb feeling that had taken hold of Dazai's being was replaced with something else. That *something* Dazai had come to associate with magic. Wordlessly commanded, the magic boiling beneath the surface began to shape itself to his will. The magic had made itself wavy and fluttering—and Dazai silently thought to it, *Wingardium Leviosa!*

The magic formed a hand, then a fist.

Then it *shoved.*

Quirrell's tight grip left his throat and the weight pressing down on Dazai's body suddenly vanished.

Dazai gasped out a choking breath the second Quirrell was off of him. He turned over onto his side to hack and spit until his lungs could fully inflate again. Through blurry vision, Dazai lifted his head up to see what had happened to Quirrell.

The man had been launched a few feet away, where he had slammed into the floor. Quirrell groaned. His palms pushed against the stone floor like he was struggling to sit up after taking the unexpected magical blow.

Panic burst to life in Dazai's chest. If Quirrell got up now, it would be all over for him. Dazai's hands were shaking and nauseous exhaustion bit at his awareness. It was now or never—he had to take out Quirrell before the professor could finish him off.

Before Quirrell could finish *Blaise* off.

Dazai frantically reached his hand around before sightlessly finding purchase on his fallen wand. He fisted it tightly. In one jerky motion, Dazai shot to his knees and towered over Quirrell's body. He was briefly met with a look of pure terror in Quirrell's expression as Dazai raised his blackthorn wand high over his head.

"*Stupe—!"* Quirrell screamed.

Staring down at his professor, a gasping breath caught in his lungs, Dazai stabbed his wand straight down into Quirrell's beating throat before the man's spell could finish casting.

Quirrell's mouth dropped open into aghast horror. A wet stutter choked out form his lips as he struggled to speak around the wand still stabbed into his neck. "M-my-yy L-L-o-r-r—"

"Shut up."

Dazai gripped the wand tight, then yanked the sharp wood out. Once it was free, Dazai let it smack against the floor and roll away, leaving a trail of red blood in its wake.

At the same time, hot, wet blood spurted out from Quirrell's gaping wound. Within seconds it was pooled around his head and body. Too much blood to live without. it continued to gush from the wound, completely unhindered until it had spread across several tiles on the floor. It ran into Dazai's hand and pooled beneath his nails.

As the blood left Quirrell, so did the faint dark aura clinging to him. Dazai took another heavy breath and watched as, drop by drop, Quirrell became nothing more than a frightened young man. A terrified man with no other creature on the back of his head.

Whatever had been keeping Voldemort in place had let him go. The Dark Lord was gone.

For once, Dazai didn't find himself caring about the information he would be losing. Exhaustion and sickness nipping at him, Dazai forced himself to turn around instead. Blaise was still lying—dead still—on the tile. The blood around his head yet to stop growing. Something thick and concerned bubbled up in Dazai's gut.

Dazai dragged himself across the stone on his hands and knees to Blaise's side. He struggled with each pull, breathing still too ragged and No Longer Human still too biting. Just when he finally reached Blaise, Dazai's arms gave out. He fell to the floor with a pained groan and reached unconsciously for the raging pain in his stomach.

Dazai tilted his neck back. "B-Blaise..."

Blaise breathed shallowly beside him.

"I thought *I* was supposed to b-be the reckless one," he gasped out, fighting for each breath against a damaged throat. "Stupid second in command."

Blaise didn't respond.

Just as Dazai's consciousness turned to an empty black, he saw the office door swing open.

The wide black eyes of Severus Snape stared down at the scene surrounding him. Taking in the two prone students and professor. The too-sharp wand cast aside. The splattering of blood across the floor.

Snape's, "Are you okay? Shit. Boys, are you okay?!" never reached Dazai's ears before unconsciousness took its hold.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 53! It's finally finished!! Thanks so much for your patience and encouraging comments :)
now that i'm all out of buffer chapters we all have to deal with the unfortunate issue of how slow i actually write LOL sorry

Chapter 54 may or may not be the last chapter in Year 1 depending on how i decide to pace it. we'll see lol

yall are the best and ily

The Bigger Picture

Chapter Summary

Dazai, having just stabbed his professor in the neck: i'm normal i promise

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Consciousness returned in three parts.

First: the echo of a warm voice. It was a muffled, mumbled voice. Dazai couldn't make out the words, exactly. His brain was pounding and stuffed full of cotton. He wanted nothing more than to go back to sleep. But the mafioso in him wouldn't let Dazai ignore the possible threat. When he tried to focus on the voice...

Second: feeling slowly crept back into his limbs. He flexed his fingers experimentally, feeling how they dragged across a light cloth. A *familiar* cloth. Dazai focused on the sensation and the sound, face scrunching up in concentration. It wasn't until the voice speaking around him finally came into focus that Dazai fully woke up.

"...hope you wake up soon, dear. You have a lot of people very concerned about you."

Something moved, pulling a blanket tighter around Dazai's shoulders. It was soft and warm and *foreign.*

And finally, third: Dazai pried his eyes open and the harsh lights of the Hogwarts infirmary bleached his vision white. Blinking repeatedly to clear his vision, Dazai's surroundings slowly came into focus.

The infirmary was quiet and calm. Dazai stared at the ceiling for a long moment, a frown pasted across his face.

What had happened? Why was he...

Quirrell. The Philosopher's Stone. Blaise.

Dazai sucked in a breath as the memories returned. Suddenly frantic, Dazai struggled to sit up-right. Pushing against the cot, he shakily levered his body into a sitting position. Every motion was sore and painful, and Dazai's skull pounded behind his eyes. His vision swam, and for a moment he had to rest his head in his hand.

"*Urgh..."* Dazai groaned, fighting against a wave a nausea.

There was a gasp. Suddenly, the sound of heels on tile rocked through the infirmary approaching Dazai's bed. He looked up and came face-to-face with Madam Pomfrey, who must have heard him shuffling around.

"You're awake!" She breathed out a relieved sigh. "Goodness. We were so worried, dear."

Dazai stared at the matron for a moment, wrestling with his thoughts and trying to make sense of her obvious relief.

Seeming to read his expression, Pomfrey explained, "With your condition, I wasn't able to use any of my healing spells." Her mouth was tight. "Luckily, I was able to reach out to St. Mungo's Hospital. They've loaned Hogwarts the use of some more... *muggle techniques."*

Dazai blinked. When Pomfrey tilted her head, he followed her gaze to see an IV stand beside the bed. A long cord traveled from the stand and was taped into Dazai's arm, slowly pumping him full of... something.

Suddenly, the room felt too cramped and Dazai drew in a shaking breath. Waking up from an unplanned unconsciousness, hooked up to a mystery chemical, sitting below a smiling doctor... the whole situation *reeked* of Mori. Dazai raised his other arm to grab at the tube—to yank it free—but Pomfrey caught him before he could. Her hands wrapped around his, then slowly placed it back on his lap.

"Don't touch that, dear," she chided gently. "It's there to keep you healthy."

Right... Mori wasn't here. It was just Madam Pomfrey, and Dazai thought he could maybe trust her. At the very least, he could trust her more than that slimy doctor of his.

"Wha—" Dazai started to ask, but his voice came out gravelly from disuse. He leaned forward with the force of an unexpected cough. Madam Pomfrey placed a hand on his back to steady him. Dazai couldn't find the energy in him to shake her off. "What's in it?"

Pomfrey nodded once she was sure that Dazai was done fussing with the tube. Then, she turned a contemplative look to him. "It's a special solution St. Mungo's produced for you, dear. Their doctors worked extra hard to make a medicinal potion that didn't require magic, so you should be grateful." She smiled slightly. "They've been researching the implications of your condition ever since I first reached out to them. Luckily, they were able to create this relatively fast because of that. Ah—but that's a conversation for another time, dear. How are you feeling?"

Dazai's eyes narrowed, then fully closed when even the slight motion made his head pound. "Fine, I think," he said off-hand. Pomfrey's words echoed through his head. His eyes snapped back open when he realized— "Wait, how long have I been out for?"

The matron folded her hands together. "Three days."

Dazai froze, mouth dropping open unwittingly.

Three days! So much could have happened in that time—so much could have gotten out of Dazai's control. A plan could crumble apart in one second, forget three whole days!

Pomfrey tutted, clearly reading something in Dazai's face. "Enough of that, now. Everything is fine, dear."

Dazai closed his mouth into a frown. He struggled to shake the lingering exhaustion from his head. It made his thoughts fuzzy and incomplete. How was he meant to plan ahead in these conditions?

"Headmaster Dumbledore will want to talk to you about what happened the other day once I let him know you're awake. You can ask him your own questions then." There was something tense in her expression that Dazai couldn't read. She was holding something back.

He had already started nodding before Pomfrey finished speaking, all too eager to fill in the holes in his memory. But Pomfrey stopped him with a raised hand.

"Take a moment to rest first, hon."

Dazai wanted to protest. He hated being left out of the loop, especially when it could have such drastic consequences. Was the Philosopher's Stone secure? Where was Quirrell? Dazai didn't know and the uncertainty was killing him. But something stopped Dazai short. The matron was watching him with an indescribable expression, features caught somewhere between worry and consideration. That odd expression held Dazai's tongue still from asking, "*what am I missing? What happened after I blacked out?"*

"You know, Severus has been in-and-out throughout the last few days to see you," Pomfrey said without warning, a knowing smile in her eyes breaking through whatever odd expression she had been wearing before, "I expect he'll be back the very second class lets out."

Dazai thoughtlessly rubbed at his tired eyes. He knew that Snape liked to fuss over him, but the information still caught him a little off guard. Before he could stop the words from escaping, Dazai asked, "Really?"

Pomfrey looked amused. "I'll let you in on a secret," she said conspiratorially, "I can' recall another time that Severus has ever cared so much for a student in the past. I think you've worn through his shields, dear."

"Ah," Dazai looked away, momenarily surprised. He quickly covered the expression with a cheeky grin, "I'm very charming like that."

"It's a good thing, to find yourself caring about another person that much," Pomfrey said carefully. She rested her hand on Dazai's for a long second before letting him go. "It takes a great deal of patience and trust to care for someone so deeply."

Dazai frowned. When Pomfrey held his gaze for a moment too long, he tore his eyes away to stare ahead at the wall instead. He rolled her words over in his head, wondering over their

meaning and was about to deflect whatever point Pomfrey was clearly trying to make with a joke when a realization struck him abruptly.

“Blaise,” Dazai gasped, turning so quickly back to Pomfrey that his vision spun, “Is Blaise okay?”

The image flashed through his head: *Blaise, unconscious on the tile floor. Blood spilling out from the back of his head. A red pool slowly spreading through the cracks on the ground...*

“Oh!” She blinked. “Your friend is fine now, dear. He took quite a blow to the head but unlike with you, I was able to use magical methods of treatment. He’s been awake for a day now, but I told Dumbledore under no circumstances should he be attending classes in this state! That goes double for you, dear.”

Dazai let out a breath that sounded a bit too much like a yawn to be anything else. Still, he couldn't help but feel relieved to know that Blaise was okay. That was good.

“In fact, he’s asleep just over there,” Pomfrey said, gesturing to the other side of the room. Dazai followed her gaze. The curtains were fully surrounding a cot. From his bed, Dazai could feel the charms locked around it. Probably some sort of privacy or sound-blocking spell. “At least, he *better* be resting. I swear, you kids...”

Dazai frowned. “Wake him up for me. I want to yell at him.” As an afterthought, he hastily added, “Ma’am.”

Pomfrey made a choking sound that may have been a laugh. “He needs his rest. So do *you,* Mr. Dazai.”

Pouting, Dazai didn’t argue the point. Sure enough, his head was pounding and his arms felt weak holding him upright. Rest *did* sound nice, as annoying as that was. It may also help to clear the drowsiness currenlty limiting his critical thinking skills. But he had only just woken up and there was already so much to do.

Dazai mentally constructed a list of the things he needed to do to salvage the situation.

Recover the Philosopher’s Stone, close the Quirrell case, and yell at his idiot subordinate.

That *sounded* simple enough, but Dazai knew it was greatly minimizing the problems at hand. There were so many variables at play now—unknowns that slipped out of Dazai’s grasp during the last few days he spent asleep.

The concentration must have shown on his face, because Pomfrey let out a sigh. “That’s enough worrying, dear. Why don’t you relax until Severus arrives?”

Dazai nodded distractedly. Pomfrey put a hand on his briefly, then crossed the room to one of her cabinets.She returned a second later with a small glass of water. Dazai accepted it, silently grateful, and took a few small sips.

Looking pleased, the matron turned back to her infirmary duties. She silently clicked through a number of glass vials. Each was filled with a differently colored potion and gave of a slight

sting of magic. Dazai mutely wondered at their purposes, but didn't ask. It wasn't like they would work on him, anyway. If Dazai tried to overdose on them (like he would with Dr. Mori's medicines), he would probably just get a stomach ache.

Letting out a breath, Dazai leaned back into the pillow. He watched the matron work with tired, half-lidded eyes. But his thoughts were elsewhere. His mind was a jumble of potential plans and outcomes.

Dazai was so lost in his head (*Where was Quirrell? What did Blaise do with the stone? How did he do magic without a spell or wand? Why did Voldemort know about the Port Mafia?)* that he nearly jumped out of bed when Snape finally did arrive.

The door to the infirmary swung open on creaking hinges. Professor Snape's greasy, black hair poked through the door first, then a pair of dark and solemn eyes followed. The second Snape's eyes locked onto Dazai's upright form, threw the door the rest of the way open.

Snape was across the room and at Dazai's side before the mafioso could even blink. Dazai didn't quite hold back a flinch at the unexpected proximity.

"You're awake," Snape said, breathless.

Dazai shifted in place.

Pomfrey tutted before Dazai could think to respond. "Don't crowd the boy, Severus. He's only just woken up within the last hour."

Though Snape didn't look apologetic, he did take a step back before drawing up a chair. He sat at his student's bedside, squinting at Dazai though an intense gaze.

Dazai, who had felt off-kilter around Snape since even before their first tea break, finally articulated, "Good evening, Sir."

Snape gave him a deadpan look. The shocked expression on his face fell into something hard and serious as he seemed to decide at once to skip over pleasantries. "You're supposed to stay out of trouble, Problem Child. Not run towards it."

Willfully shrugging off his discomfort, Dazai replied, "It's more like trouble comes to me."

Snape raised a brow. Then, he let out a sigh and fell back into the chair. Snape stared at him for a long moment, assessing, before seeming to come to a conclusion. "I can hardly go *one day* without you causing one problem or another for me. It seems that no amount of patience can teach you to just keep your head down."

"Oh. Have you been trying to teach me something like that?"

"Among other things," Snape said, sounding more tired than angry. Dazai tilted his head and tried to figure out what that sort of expression meant. When Snape saw the gesture, he narrowed his eyes. "I know that some professors here falsely believe that no student is unteachable. Unfortunately for them, *you* exist."

Dazai snorted. Silently, however, Dazai disagreed with Snape's assessment. Sure, Dazai rarely did as instructed. But that didn't mean he didn't learn the lesson. For instance, Dazai *knew* that Snape wanted him to stay away from the dangerous mess that was Quirrell. He just couldn't find it in himself to care. There were always more important things to do.

Even though Dazai purposefully kept his thoughts from reflecting on his face, Snape heaved out a peeved sigh anyway.

"You'd better not be thinking anything problematic, Mr. Dazai. *I'm* the one who has to do all of the paperwork regarding this... incident. Don't complicate things."

"You'll do that? Not the headmaster?" Dazai asked innocently.

"Him too." Snape puffed out another breath. He turned a serious eye to Dazai, holding the boy's focus. It was long enough to make Dazai uncomfortable, and he started scratching at his wrist unconsciously. "Stop that."

Dazai blinked away from Snape's stare and down to his hands. He toyed with the frayed edges of his bandages for a second before letting his fingers fall, limp.

After a second, Snape cleared his throat. Dazai obediently looked back up to see the potion master's thoughtful but exhausted face. "Regarding what happened on Sunday," he halted, making sure he had Dazai's full attention, "I expect a *complete* account of what occurred between yourself and Professor Quirrell. Do you understand? You will leave no details out."

Dazai considered his answer, but before he could get a word out—

"Severus!" Madam Pomfrey shrilled. Dazai glanced over to her quickly, having mostly forgotten she was still lingering around. The matron wore a firm expression and had her hands poised on her hips. "He's meant to be *resting,* not answering to your interrogations! Let the poor boy relax a little before you talk about—" her voice caught, but quickly recovered, "—about all of that."

Snape shared a brief look with Pomfrey. They were definitely having some kind of silent conversation. Furrowed brow, Dazai tried and failed to dissect the meaning. After an awkwardly long moment, Pomfrey turned away to continue organizing her potions.

"When the headmaster arrives," Snape concluded. Dazai's attention snapped back to the potion's professor. "Until then, Poppy is correct. You need to focus on recovering."

"When will he be here? The headmaster."

"Tonight," Snape answered immediately.

"Tomorrow," Pomfrey said.

They shared another look before Snape finally relented, "Tomorrow morning, Albus and I will come here to discuss with you the events of Sunday. Do not try and weasel your way out of this."

“Wouldn’t dream of it, Sir.” He really wouldn’t. After all, Dazai had just as many questions about the situation as Snape and Dumbledore did!

Snape leveled him with a long stare before finally rising to his feet. “Good.” He shot a look to Dazai’s now-still hands. “Behave yourself.”

Dazai splayed his fingers out and smiled.

Snape sighed. He raised a hand, slowly telegraphing the movement. Palm out, Snape’s hand hesitated in the air for along moment. Dazai squinted, trying to track the appendage where it had stalled just above his curly-haired head.

After a long second, Snape let out a frustrated sigh and stole his hand back. His cheeks were dusted red.

Dazai blinked. Was... *was Snape about to pet his head?* He almost wanted to laugh, but before Dazai could get a word in edgewise, the professor had departed from the infirmary in a flurry of flustered steps.

Pomfrey laughed.

He shot her a look, but the matron was already back to working on her potions. Letting out an exasperated breath of his own, Dazai pushed back into the cot. If it wasn’t such a hassle, then Dazai could appreciate Snape’s attention for what it was: easy leverage. But all the fluff that came with it...

Dazai put a hand on his head, touching down where Snape had hesitated to before. He ruffled the locks around with a frown.

“Are you getting sentimental, Dazai?”

Dazai neck snapped to the side. “Blaise!”

Sitting in his own cot, Blaise gave a lopsided smile. There was an amused look on his face, but Dazai was easily able to see the relief and genuine happiness behind it. Dazai wondered, briefly, what sort of expression *he* was wearing.

Pomfrey, who was pulling the last of Blaise’s curtains to the side, gave both boys a semi-serious look. “Since your both awake now, I’ll let you to have a talk. But if I see even one of you getting out of bed, both of you boys will be on bed rest for *twice as long.”*

“ Ah...yes ma’am.”

Nodding, Pomfrey’s expression quickly melted into a warm smile. “Good. I’ll be in my office. Yell if you need anything at all, boys.” After cleaning up some of her medicines, Pomfrey gave a final nod before disappearing behind an ajar door near the far-wall.

Once she was gone from view, Dazai’s attention immediately snapped back to Blaise. He looked his friend up-and-down, searching for any wounds. Luckily, it seemed that whatever

magical cures Pomfrey used were just that—*magical.* Blaise appeared as healthy as ever. He didn't even look especially tired.

As if reading his thoughts, Blaise said, "I'm all healed up, unlike you. Madam Pomfrey insisted that I stay at least one more day for monitoring, though. She said I'll probably be well enough to return to classes tomorrow. There hasn't been much to do except to sleep and wait for you to wake up in the meantime."

"Sounds boring."

"It was," Blaise said, tilting his chin up. "But I'm glad I stayed. I think it would have driven me crazy, to not be here to see that you were okay."

Dazai's mouth dropped open and warm blood rushed to his face. "Blaise is embarrassing, saying things like that!"

Blaise shrugged, clearly nonplussed by Dazai's reaction. "Don't do reckless things, then, if you don't want to hear my worrying."

Pouting, Dazai crossed his arms. He leveled Blaise with a serious stare. "If anyone should be lecturing here, it's me." With a short glance to Pomfrey's open office door, Dazai suddenly dropped his voice into a low whisper. "What were you thinking, jumping in front of that Stupefy, Blaise? You know a spell like that won't work on me!"

"I was thinking," Blaise said, just as quietly, "*What in the world is my boss doing now?"*

" While your loyalty is admirable, that was still unnecessary."

"Was it?"

When Blaise didn't elaborate, Dazai uncrossed his arms. "I had everything under control. And I seem to recall having assigned you a task *other* than bodyguard."

Blaise stared him down, face blank. Then, as if suddenly remembering something, he clapped. "Oh! That's right."

"Hm? What did Blaise do now?" Dazai asked. "I wasn't done telling you off, you know."

"I think you know that's not going to stop me from caring about you."

Dazai sniffed, but held Blaise's gaze steady. The other snake shuffled in his seat, but didn't look abashed about what he had said. No... he seemed apprehensive. The expression drew a thin frown onto Dazai's face.

"Seriously, what did you do?" *And how much cleaning up after you am I going to have to do?*
" Blaise..." Dazai started, a dark thought suddenly occurring to him, "Where is the stone?"

After seeming to steel himself, Blaise answered quickly and quietly, "It's in safe hands."

Dazai paused, eyes narrowed. Blaise didn't wilt under the intense stare. "But not *your* hands."

"No." He shook his head minutely. "Draco is holding on to it." When Dazai merely blinked to show he was processing the information, Blaise rolled on, "I know that you're hesitant to bring him into the gang, but I trust him. I gave him the stone on Sunday, and he's held onto it since then. He hasn't even told Pansy about it."

Dazai watched Blaise, but his mind was a flurry of thoughts. He wouldn't lie—he was a little surprised that Draco *hadn't* betrayed them and turned the stone over to Hogwarts or his father. Dazai turned the information over in his head, trying to find whatever piece of the puzzle he was missing.

Dissecting this turn of events, Dazai could at least be relived somewhat. The Philosopher's Stone was under a somewhat ambiguous ownership, currently. But at least it wasn't in the school's possession—or Quirrell's, for that matter.

"I won't apologize for it."

Dazai shook himself from his thoughts. He gave Blaise a perplexed frown.

"It was only because of Draco that I was able to come back for you." Blaise sighed, speaking before Dazai could even think to object, "And don't tell me it wasn't necessary. Madam Pomfrey told me that when Professor Snape arrived, you were already passed out. Magic makes you sick, even if it doesn't work properly on you. I'm glad I could shield you from even just that little bit of discomfort."

Dazai held his frown, then looked away. Blaise didn't need to know how close it actually had been—how sickness and unconsciousness bit at his vision right up until he very end. How Quirrell's terrified face was little more than a blur in the last few seconds of their fight.

Could one more spell have lost Dazai the battle?

In all honestly, Dazai didn't know. But he *did* know that the fight was a lot closer than he would have liked it to have been.

With a sigh of his own, Dazai looked back to Blaise. "Since you're my second in command, I'll let it go just this once." Father wouldn't be so lenient in the Port Mafia... but he and Mori weren't here right now to police how Dazai ran his operations. "More importantly—where is Draco? I need to talk with him, since you've decided to drag him into our mess."

"Probably in the dorm rooms." Blaise shrugged. "It's late enough."

Right—Blaise wouldn't know. Even though the other boy had been awake longer, he still wasn't currently allowed out of the infirmary. Dazai screwed up his expression. Then, forcing himself upright, he started to push off of the cot.

"Don't get up. Didn't you hear what Madam Pomfrey said?" Blaise asked, sitting up straight. There was a note of wariness in his voice that Dazai easily dismissed.

Shooting the other boy a look, Dazai cautiously heeded the warning to stay put. “I’m going to find Draco, obviously. Don’t look surprised like that.”

Blaise watched him, brows pressed together. “Boss,” he said, slowly, “You aren’t thinking straight.” Before Dazai could protest, Blaise continued, “You’re still unwell, and Madam Pomfrey will notice the minute you leave the infirmary. Besides, Draco has been hiding the stone for a few days now. I’m sure he can hold onto it for one more.”

Dazai clawed into the cloth blanket with white-knuckled fingers. “This is important.”

“So is *this,”* Blaise said. He gestured loosely to the infirmary around them.

Staring at Blaise for a long moment, it was an uncomfortable amount of time before Dazai finally relented. He leaned back into the cot without much fuss. Even though it put him on edge, when Dazai really thought about it he *could* see some merits to waiting.

Showing Draco some level of trust might indebt the boy to him. It would also help to affirm Blaise’s loyalty by showing that he respected his second in command’s decisions.

That, and Dazai still had an interrogation with the headmaster to lie through. He needed his strength. He *also* needed to not be holding onto the Philosopher's Stone when Dumbledore was three feet away from him.

The same sense of urgency Dazai often felt while in the infirmary didn’t lessen, but he was able to channel it elsewhere. Last time, it had been with the twins’ help. This time...

“Will you tell me what else I’ve missed?”

Blaise shot him a warning look. It was as if he knew that, despite the change of pace, Dazai’s mind was still overworking itself on the subject of Draco and the Philosopher’s Stone (it *was.* Dazai’s thoughts always moved a mile a minute, and once a plan was formed in his head, it stayed there to be re-worked and re-charted forever). But after only a second, Blaise gave his report.

“Apparently the gang has been by quite a few times since then. I only saw them once yesterday.” He paused. “They’re worried about us... and Hermione is very concerned about getting in trouble. But otherwise, they’re fine. I don’t think Professor Quirrell or anyone else ever quite realized how involved they were.”

Dazai inclined his head in thought. That was an interesting bit of speculation. Definitely something for Dazai to inspect closer after his bigger problems were addressed. Though it wouldn’t hurt to touch base with the rest of his gang about it before Dumbledore’s interrogation in the morning.

“Headmaster Dumbledore talked to me yesterday,” Blaise continued, words perfunctory as always, “but I think he’s more interested in speaking with you, since you were the one to actually face off against Professor Quirrell.”

Dazai nodded. That made sense. “What did he ask you about?”

Blaise took another second to collect his thoughts. “Mostly he asked about what happened on Sunday. I got the impression he wanted to ask about something else, but was holding back.”

That was probably right, Dazai thought. Between the Philosopher’s Stone and now the return of Voldemort, Dumbledore would be smart to play his cards close to his chest. Especially when he couldn’t be sure just how involved Blaise was in the whole ordeal.

Dazai considered the situation. He would have to construct his own story very carefully. Something made him think that dodging Snape’s interrogations would be much easier than dodging Dumbledore’s. Everyone in the gang needed to have a matching story.

Thoughtful, he asked, “Hm... What did tell him?”

“I told him the truth,” Blaise said. “That Professor Quirrell wanted to meet with you alone. And how that made me worry, because I knew how uncomfortable he’s made you feel in the past.” He shook his head. “I went to go find a professor for help, but when I ran into Draco and Pansy I decided to send them for help while I went back to check on you.”

Dazai nodded as he absorbed the information. Silently, he filled in the story’s gaps: The Philosopher’s Stone. Draco’s invitation to the gang. Everything that happened that Blaise would have wanted to keep to himself.

“You know the rest. I saw Professor Quirrell pointing his wand at you and moved without thinking.”

“How did Dumbledore react to that?”

“He didn’t say much,” Blaise explained. “Just said it was a good thing that I was there to help you, and that he was regretful to have hired someone so unstable.”

Dazai hummed. Speaking of Quirrell... “So the headmaster didn’t say what happened to Quirrell?” Dazai asked, but he was pretty sure he already knew the answer.

“No. He didn’t say anything.” Blaise frowned, looking thoughtful about that fact. He shrugged. “I haven’t seen him around, at least.”

Dazai waved a hand in dismissal. “That’s fine. Is there anything else I missed?”

Blaise seemed to wrack his memories for a second.

While the boy thought, Dazai stifled a yawn. Despite having been asleep for the last few days, Dazai’s body was still recovering. No Longer Human always took its toll, after all. And Quirrell had struck him with no small number of spells. His head pounded in agreement.

Blaise caught Dazai’s eye across the room. “Maybe you should get some rest.”

“In a bit,” he argued, “I want you to fill me in on everything first. I’d rather not be caught off guard by something Dumbledore asks me about tomorrow.”

“Hmm...” Blaise seemed to consider something briefly. “Well, whatever happened with Professor Quirrell, he’s not teaching anymore. Hermione told me that all Defense Against the Dark Arts classes have been cancelled since the week started.”

Dazai’s eyes narrowed further.

Watching his expression closely, Blaise shrugged. “There’s not much more to say. No one has been very forthcoming with information about what happened.”

“They probably want to get a better handle on the situation before going public with it,” Dazai explained off-hand. Did Hogwarts have the political power to do something like that? “That’s what I would do.”

Especially if said situation involved the return of a thought-dead terrorist organization and a priceless stolen artifact. Two problems that had *Dazai* smack-dab in the middle.

“One last question...” Dazai trailed off. When Blaise nodded to show he was listening, Dazai held his gaze. The question had been itching at his mind ever since Blaise re-told his story... “Did you notice anything strange? About Professor Quirrell.”

Blaise blinked. “I... Other than that he was trying to kill you?”

Dazai nodded.

“It was all kind of a blur,” Blaise said, voice distinctly apologetic. “Was there something I should have noticed? I was more focused on the wand pointed at you.”

Which meant...

Blaise hadn’t noticed the face of Voldemort on Quirrell's head, then. Given their positioning in the room and the desperate nature of the situation, Dazai couldn’t fault him for it. Still... Dazai covered his mouth in thought. Would it be best to tell Blaise about the Death Eaters, or keep the information to himself...?

What would Mori do?

Letting out an exhausted breath, Dazai collapsed back into his cot. “What a mess,” he grumbled, throwing an arm over his eyes to blot out the light. They sat in silent for a long moment while Dazai tried to formulate a plan of action. After a bit of deliberation, he finally decided, “...I need to send a letter.”

"What was that, dear?”

Dazai dropped his arm to peer up at Madam Pomfrey. The matron must have left her office and crossed the room while he was lost in thought. Her heels tapped against the tile as she walked to Blaise’s cot and set something down in his lap.

Dazai shrugged. “Nothing, ma’am.”

Pomfrey turned to him, an odd look on her face. She shook it off after a second and replaced it with a plain smile. “I’ll take your word for it. Don’t hesitate to let me know if something is bothering you, though. I know Hogwarts doesn’t exactly have the medical supplies to treat you, but I’ll still try everything I can to help.”

She must have been able to see the discomfort written across his face. When No Longer Human roiled in his stomach, Dazai sighed.

“Here,” Pomfrey said quietly. She walked across the room, leaving Blaise to stand at the side of Dazai’s bed. She set a plate on his lap. It was full of foods that turned Dazai’s stomach just to look at. “I’ve noticed you’re doing better with eating, hun. I’m very proud of you. But you could still use some meat on your bones. Especially when recovering.”

“Uh—”

“Hush.” Without another word, Pomfrey went back to her matron duties.

Dazai watched her blankly for a long minute, stupefied by the sudden weight on his lap. It was silent in the infirmary for a long moment before Dazai cautiously took a bite out of a dinner roll. He pretended not to see Pomfrey’s pleased smile while he ate.

The next morning came both too early and too late at the same time.

Still exhausted and hurting, Dazai would have greatly appreciated more time to rest. Even in the silence of the infirmary, he had trouble fully relaxing. His mind was abuzz with half-formed plans and scattered information. Even then, it was difficult to cement down a course of action when his body stung with magical overuse.

But at the same time, Dazai was relieved when the sun finally rose over the horizon. Talking with Dumbledore would be a challenge, but at least it meant getting some tangible information to work with. *What had happened to Quirrell?* And more notably, *how much did the headmaster know about him?*

So while Dazai may have been woefully under-prepared for a full-on interrogation, there were certain benefits to the situation. Knowing Snape would be at the meeting eased the burden somewhat as well.

In the end, Dazai decided not to dwell too much on the problem. There wasn’t anything he could do about it now except to try to navigate the oncoming confrontation.

Thinking this, Dazai slowly pushed himself into an upright position in the cot. He stretched his arms high over his head with a groan. The action burned. With a yawn, Dazai leaned across the bed. He gave the curtains a tug, swinging them open to reveal the rest of the infirmary in all its quiet, morning glory.

Blaise's bed curtains were still pulled tight, but Madam Pomfrey was awake and organizing some glass bottles by the cabinet. When she heard Dazai move, Pomfrey tilted her head in his direction.

"Good morning, dear. Are we feeling any better this morning?"

Dazai rolled his shoulders, a wave of discomfort washing over his entire body. "I am," he lied, smiling. "It's all thanks to your help, ma'am."

Pomfrey shot him a suspicious look. Then, with a sigh, she set down the potion in her hand and turned to face Dazai more fully. "I hope that's the case. St. Mungo's was able to create an incredible, non-magic medicine for you, but I worry that—and I never thought I'd say this—I think you may be better off in a muggle hospital."

Dazai tilted his head. He held back a response, instead humming noncommittally.

She let out a breath, then gave a tight smile. "Never mind that. Why don't you eat breakfast, dear? Severus stopped by about ten minutes ago—he and the headmaster will be here shortly. You'll want to have your energy for that." Saying this, she handed him a plate.

Dazai eyed the toast and fruits with distaste.

After a long pause, Dazai took a minuscule bite of bread. He was relieved when Pomfrey finally turned away from him and back to her potions.

Idly, Dazai tried to guess at what the potions were for based on their magical signatures. Having very little to compare the feelings to, Dazai didn't have much luck. He was glaring down a bubbling, orange brew when Blaise woke up.

They chattered quietly about innocuous topics while they ate. Occasionally, Madam Pomfrey would chime in with a comment about one thing or another. Dazai found he didn't dislike her presence nearly as much as he had during their first unfortunate encounter. Now that he knew how *different* Pomfrey was from Mori, it wasn't hard. Doctor Mori was very unlikable. Madam Pomfrey... wasn't.

Shortly after, the infirmary door opened, cutting of their conversation abruptly.

Dumbledore stepped through the door first, followed quickly by Snape.

"I do hope I'm not interrupting something," the headmaster said, a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

"Not at all," Pomfrey smiled, "The boys were just finishing up their breakfast."

Dumbledore nodded. He was smiling—looking entirely non-threatening. But Dazai was familiar with deception. He could see the serious glint hiding just beneath the surface. The thoughtful twitch of a brow. The calculated pull of his lips.

Headmaster Dumbledore was someone who wanted to *look* kind while systematically prying piece after piece of information from his target.

Dazai had noticed it when they first met, but now he was facing it head-on.

He considered giving a wide, toothy smile in return but held back. He wanted to play this with a bit more class. With Quirrell, Dazai felt comfortable teasing his opponent. For all Quirrell was an enemy, he was really only the puppet of a much larger threat. Dumbledore, on the other hand, was undoubtedly someone to watch out for.

Instead of returning the man's pleasant smile, Dazai shuffled in his seat and averted his gaze. His eyes landed on Blaise.

The other snake met him with a raise of his brow.

"I suppose you'll be wanting to talk now," Pomfrey said, drawing Dazai's attention back to their guests. "I'd say you could use my office, but I'm worried about Mr. Dazai's health. I'd prefer if he stayed in bed for a while longer."

Dumbledore raised a placating hand. "That won't be necessary. We'll be alright discussing here."

Snape cleared his throat and stepped out from behind Dumbledore's shoulder. "We will be requiring some level of privacy." He shot a glance to Blaise. "Is Mr. Zabini well enough to leave the infirmary momentarily?"

Pomfrey nodded. She and Snape had a brief conversation, but Dazai's attention was focused fully on the headmaster instead. Dumbledore met his gaze with a pair of smiling eyes. Their staring contest held for nearly a minute before Dazai was forced to tear his attention back to Pomfrey and Blaise.

They were both standing by the door.

"I'll be back once you're done talking," Pomfrey told him, "Under no circumstances should you be straining yourself, understand?"

"Ah... I understand, ma'am."

"Good. That goes for the both of you, too. If either of you stress Mr. Dazai out, I'll have a lecture coming your way!"

While Snape nodded, serious, Dumbledore merely chuckled.

Blaise raised a hand in goodbye. "I'm headed back to the common rooms. Want me to grab something for you while I'm there?"

Dazai hummed. There were quite a few things he needed Blaise to do for him, actually. But nothing Dazai thought he could get away with saying under the watchful eyes of the Hogwarts headmaster. Thinking this, he shook his head. "I don't think so. Say hi to Draco and Pansy for me."

Blaise raised a brow at the mention of Pansy, but didn't question it. "Sure. I'll check back in during lunch."

Dazai waved, and a few seconds later Pomfrey was ushering Blaise out of the room. She followed after with a short warning glare to Snape, Dumbledore, and Dazai before finally shutting the door with a click.

Immediately, the temperature in the room seemed to drop. Without Blaise or Pomfrey there to buffer the weight of Dumbledore's stare, the seriousness of the situation bled out into the room.

Dazai held his breath. He looked back to Dumbledore for a second, but eventually settled his gaze on Snape.

"Good morning, Professor, Headmaster."

"Good morning," Dumbledore echoed, soundly lightly amused. He sat on the cot adjacent to Dazai's. Snape pulled up a chair. "You gave us all quite the scare, Mr. Dazai. I trust you're recovering well."

Dazai shrugged. He gestured vaguely to the IV stand. Madam Pomfrey had taken the IV out of his arm late the previous night, but the equipment was still nearby in case of emergency. The non-magical equipment stood out like a sore-thumb beside the various potions and charmed items around the room. "As well as I can be, with this."

Dumbledore hummed sagely. "I do apologize for the lack of medical care." A flicker of some emotion crossed his face for only a second. "The magical community as a whole has never encountered a condition like yours before. We may have to work out an alternative to your recovery."

"An alternative?" Dazai asked, too curious to hold his tongue.

Immediately, Snape's expression shifted. When he spoke, he looked as if the very words stung to bite out. "The headmaster has contacted your father regarding the situation. We're waiting to hear back from him about the possibility of sending you home from Hogwarts early."

Dumbledore spoke over the surprised look on Dazai's face. "For someone such as yourself, having access to muggle treatments may be more helpful than what Hogwarts can currently provide."

Dazai blinked, rolling the information over in his head. He might be going home early? He ignored the way his stomach clenched at merely the thought. He always knew that he would be going home eventually, so why did the idea make him so uneasy *now..?*

Working to keep the discomfort from showing on his face, Dazai asked, "Early? What about my final exams?"

"Certainly, your health is more important than a few tests you were bound to fail anyway, Mr. Dazai."

“Considering your condition, your professors and I are in agreement,” Dumbledore said amicably, “Having you demonstrate your magical prowess would be further detrimental to your health. Until we can create a more functional new curriculum for you, we agree it would be best to exempt you from practical exams.”

“Ah, that’s kind of a relief.” Dazai chuckled.

Snape rolled his eyes. “You still have to do your written assignments.”

The headmaster’s eyes scrunched up in good humor. “Very true! Whether you return home to Japan or not, I expect your professors will ensure you have plenty to work on before the next year.”

Dazai made a face at that. Silently, he had already resolved not to do any summer assignments. Judging by the scowl on Snape’s face, the potion master had already concluded as much as well. Still, Dazai cheerfully replied, “I’ll do my best, Sir.”

Dumbledore offered another smile, but his eyes no longer wrinkled with genuine emotion. Dazai tensed up automatically.

“With that discussed,” the headmaster began, “I would like to move on to more pressing matters.”

“Quirrell,” Dazai translated.

“Just so." There was a glimmer of concentration in Dumbledore's eyes. It tore through Dazai’s blank expression, trying to find something to latch onto.

Now that the necessary pleasantries were out of the way...

Dazai felt his mental barriers forcefully slam shut. He needed Dumbledore to get only the information Dazai was willing to share. No more and no less. *And to do that,* Dazai thought, *how would a normal child act if they had just been randomly attacked by a professor claiming to be from a terrorist organization?*

“ Tell me about how you know Quirinus Quirrell,” Dumbledore prompted.

Shooting a passive glance to Snape, Dazai frowned. “He’s my professor?”

“How did you get involved with him?” Snape reiterated more forcefully. “What made him pull you aside on Sunday?”

Dazai considered the question. He decided on an honest answer, not liking the assessing curve of Dumbledore's lips. “The same thing that made *you* interrogate me on Sunday, Sir. He thought I stole the Philosopher’s Stone.”

Admitting even this much was a calculated risk. While it was a believable truth to follow, it only opened more questions. But those questions were exactly what Dazai wanted.

Based on the way Dumbledore and Snape stilled, Dazai knew they had reached the expected conclusion:

If Dazai didn't steal the stone and Quirrell didn't steal the stone... who did?

The truth itself was a distraction. Dazai knew that Snape would believe him. Based on their previous conversations, he knew that he was completely innocent in the potion master's eyes. Because of that, they would be forced to conclude that there was someone *else* in Hogwarts that was after the stone. While Hogwarts was busy frantically searching for a secret third-party thief, Dazai could safely ship the Philosopher's Stone back home.

"How curious," Dumbledore hummed. "I wonder how he came to suspect you of stealing it."

Dazai shrugged. He'd let them draw their own conclusions. There were any number of ways for Quirrell to have hypothetically learned about Dazai's research into the Philosopher's Stone. Including, but not limited to, Dazai outright saying it to his face.

Taking control of the interrogation, he explained, "I'm sure Blaise already told you, but Professor Quirrell pulled me aside on Sunday after my talk with Professor Snape. He wanted me to give him the Philosopher's Stone. I told him that I didn't have it."

Well, more or less. They didn't have to know that Quirrell wanted far more than just the stone.

He wanted me.

" I take it that's when he attacked you." Snape's fists were white knuckled on his lap.

"Yeah," Dazai said with a nod. "That's when Blaise came in and..." he trailed off, trying to give off the impression of a child scared for his best friend. It wasn't difficult.

Snape cleared his throat. He looked to be struggling to keep his expression neutral. "Then what did you do?" He prompted, voice quiet.

He shifted in his seat, fingers clenching oddly at his side. Dazai supposed a normal person would be more anxious when talking about being attacked by their teacher. Well... Attacked by their teacher, and then *stabbing their teacher in the throat.*

"I tried to fight him off with some spells. But I wasn't able to cast anything." He averted his gaze. "I started to feel sick."

Snape nodded, clearly understanding the predicament after having witnessed Dazai in the infirmary in the past. Dumbledore offered an unobtrusive smile. Dazai thought it looked more contemplative than sympathetic, however.

Dazai squinted down at the tile floor, considering what to say next. The image of Quirrell's bloody face flashed through his head. The feeling of ripping a wand from the man's neck. The blood—*too much blood to be anything but...*

He could still feel their eyes on him. Though they were clearly trying to give him time to collect his thoughts, Dazai really used the pause to perfect his mask. Fingers twitching at his sides, Dazai quietly asked, “What happened to Professor Quirrell?”

Snape drew in a sharp breath.

“Why don’t you finish telling us your story first?” Dumbledore asked instead.

“I stabbed him with my wand,” Dazai finished, head snapping up to meet the headmaster’s watchful eyes once again. “Is he dead?”

Shock flashed across both Snape’s and Dumbledore's faces. Dumbledore schooled his expression first. They hadn’t expected Dazai to outright say it—that much was clear. But Dazai was much too familiar with death to be shy around the topic. Besides that, Dazai didn’t want to waste time dancing around the subject. He was trying to pry information from them as much as they were him.

He turned to Snape. The potions professor’s face had taken on a sickly pallor and he watched Dazai with an indescribable emotion in his eyes. Once he noticed Dazai’s gaze on him, he let out a breath. At once, all of the horror in his expression melted into something more sedated. Sorrowful.

“Yes,” he said. When Dumbledore shot him a brief look, Snape ignored it. “Quirrell is dead.”

Good, Dazai thought. But his posture told a different story. Hunched shoulders and wavering eye-contact... If Dazai wanted to give off the impression that he wasn’t deeply involved in the Philosopher’s Stone conspiracy, appearing like the victim was critical. He shook his head. “I killed him.”

Snape’s breathing shuddered.

When Dazai turned to Dumbledore, the headmaster’s eyes were on him. He couldn’t read whatever emotion was written there. *What exactly was Dumbledore thinking..?*

“ It was self-defense,” Snape corrected, a growl in his voice.

Dazai blinked at them, expression slack. Again, he was relieved to have Snape here. The man has defended him in the past, and it seemed now was no different.

“That does appear to be the case,” Dumbledore chimed in. “Hogwarts will be treating this ordeal as such.”

Curiosity getting the better of him, Dazai asked, “Just Hogwarts? Aren’t there magical courts, or something?”

Dumbledore tilted his head. Whether he was considering the question or Dazai himself was unknown. “The Wizengamot, yes.”

Dazai nodded, remembering that name from some of the many books he’d read throughout the year. The Wizengamot was the wizarding world’s highest court. Though their trials were

notoriously brief, they often ruled over highly significant issues. Distantly, Dazai mused that he should probably brush up on his knowledge of the magical legal system. This wasn't Yokohama—the Port Mafia hadn't bought off any legal officials here.

"They may pursue a trial," Dumbledore concluded, drawing Dazai's attention back to him, "but I suspect they will not. Once the full story breaks out, there will be larger issues to focus on."

Snape sighed. "If there *is* a trial, it won't be against you."

"No?" That was interesting, but not entirely unexpected. Hogwarts had been watching Quirrell all year. Dazai's involvement in the conflict was relatively minor, compared to that. Quirrell's death was a consequence of a much larger, ongoing issue. That being... "About the Philosopher's Stone?"

Dumbledore's eyes narrowed. Dazai met the gaze head-on, trying to seem earnest. After another second, the headmaster calmly asked, "Did Quirrell say anything else during your encounter?"

He's fishing for something, Dazai thought.

Dazai tipped his head to the side. Remembering Blaise's account of events, he said, "Ah... it's all kind of a blur."

"Anything at all," Dumbledore repeated.

Dazai closed his eyes in thought. There was really only two things that Dumbledore could be searching for, he thought.

First: the location of the Philosopher's Stone. Dazai wouldn't give that truth up. Regardless, he had already convinced his interrogators that the stone was neither in Quirrell's nor his own possession. He'd leave investigating that false lead up to them.

Second: Voldemort.

All year long, Hogwarts had been watching Quirrell. Before Dazai even knew what the Philosopher's Stone was, they knew Quirrell wanted to steal it. Clearly, there was a greater conspiracy at play here. One that went well beyond Dazai's involvement. Considering all of the information, Dazai could only conclude that *this* was the root of Dumbledore's questioning.

Who was Quirrell really?

Which also meant that Dumbledore had long since suspected the thought-dead Death Eaters were still active. *Interesting... but not particularly relevant right now.*

Dazai considered how much to say. He had seen Voldemort's face vanish before Quirrell died. Would telling Dumbledore about that benefit him in some way, he wondered?

No... Dazai wouldn't mention about Voldemort's face. At least not until he had time to do some research of his own. There were too many unknowns. Still, Dazai was confident that some time in the library might reveal the truth to him. If not there, then maybe he could finally convince Mori to tell him what in the hell was actually going on. There was no need to rely on Snape or Dumbledore for that.

"Well, there might have been something," Dazai finally said. "It wasn't a phrase I recognized."

Both listeners perked up at that. Dumbledore urged him forward with a kind smile that Dazai mentally rolled his eyes at.

Carefully watching their expressions, Dazai started, "He mentioned something called a 'death eater.' I don't know what that is," he lied, playing up the *innocent muggle-born* character, "but I think that's what he wanted the Philosopher's Stone for."

Immediately, something in their demeanors changed. For Snape, it was a wary dread. For Dumbledore, it was a thin-eyed contemplation. They both sat, tense. Snape and Dumbledore shared a private glance before obviously attempting to hide their reactions to the words "death eater."

Dazai pretended not to notice while silently committing their reactions to memory.

"The Death Eaters," Snape said, "are a dangerous organization. Do *not* interact with them."

"Ah..." Dazai sniffed. "I wasn't trying to, you know."

Snape stared at him, a fierce emotion in his eyes.

"You are certain he mentioned the Death Eaters?"

Dazai turned to Dumbledore. "That's what he said."

The headmaster hummed and Dazai left the man to his thoughts. Whatever conclusions Dumbledore drew from that tidbit of information, it wouldn't be enough to lead him to the Port Mafia's involvement. With Mori's only instruction being to retrieve the Philosopher's Stone, that was good enough for Dazai for now.

"And there was nothing else?" Dumbledore asked abruptly.

Taking another calculated risk, Dazai said, "He might have mentioned some Voldymort guy. Is he a Death Eater, too?"

If their reactions before were shock, then *this* was something new entirely. Both Dumbledore and Snape froze, eyes going wide. Snape snapped upright in his chair.

"Voldemort?" Dumbledore clarified.

Dazai shrugged, watching their faces carefully. Their reactions to the name gave away more information than their carefully monitored words ever could.

“What did he say *exactly?”* Snape asked.

“Um...” Dazai’s brows pinched together in thought. He had no intention of telling them that he had actually *spoken* with this Voldemort fellow. But they hadn’t talked about much that wouldn’t implicate Dazai in one thing or another. “Vold-guy is his boss or something. Professor Quirrell said he was supposed to get the stone for him. He must have been in a lot of trouble for failing, since he was bugging me about it.”

That was technically true, even if it *was* mostly an inference on Dazai’s part. Still, mafia-types tended to have similar problems. Although this *had been* the first mafioso he had met with their boss literally growing on the back of their head. Just the thought had Dazai shivering now.

Something dark crossed over Dumbledore’s face. It was the face of a schemer, Dazai recognized. A fellow chess-player.

...a chess-player who didn’t realize the boy in front of him was playing as well. Quirrell had made the same mistake. In the end, that alone had been his downfall.

Dazai shook his head, already resolved to keep the rest of his and Quirrell’s conversations to himself. “I don’t think there was anything else.” He tugged at the bandages on his wrist. “Not that I remember, at least... I really killed him, then?”

Snape sighed, long and heavy. Dazai blinked, shocked, as Snape’s hand came to rest on his own. Warm fingers wrapped around his, preventing him from picking at his wrist.

“Mr. Dazai,” he said, voice gravelly, “you understand that the Quirrell is the only party in the wrong here. He attacked you—*a child.* ”

Dazai pulled his hand away a second too late. Snape let him go with another weary breath.

“Hogwarts agrees, of course,” Dumbledore added, diplomatic as ever. He brushed off Dazai’s faux-guilt easily. “Regardless, for Quirrell to mention Voldemort by name, I believe the Death Eaters are far more active than we had originally suspected. We’ll have to act quickly. Severus—”

“You can’t be serious.”

Dumbledore frowned, turning to face Snape head-on. Dazai mimicked the motion. Why did Snape suddenly look so livid?

There was a dark pinch between his brows and anger behind his eyes. “Two of your students were *nearly killed* by Quirrell, and you’re just going to look past it in favor of you so-called *bigger picture*?!”

“The care of Mr. Dazai and Mr. Zabini lies with Poppy. We would best utilize our time focusing on greater issues.”

“‘*Greater issues’—”*

“ Severus,” Dumbledore chided.

Snape’s lip curled like there was something more he wanted to say. With a surreptitious glance to Dazai, however, he only bit out a sharp, “*Fine* .”

Dazai looked between Dumbledore and Snape.

As if only just remembering his audience, Dumbledore smiled thinly at Dazai. “I am glad you are feeling better, lad. If you think of anything else Quirrell said to you, do not hesitate to find me.”

“...Right.” Dazai considered Dumbledore for a long moment. The other man was just as calculative as he had expected. However, it was still a little surprising. Unlike Snape, Dumbledore barely seemed to register that his student had just murdered someone. His willingness to overlook what many others would consider grave...

It reminded Dazai a lot of the Port Mafia.

When Dazai really thought about it, did he feel safe giving *either* of these organizations the Philosopher’s Stone?

No. The answer was a resounding *no.*

After having said his piece, Dumbledore slowly rose from his seat. He patted down his robes, dusting off some invisible piece of lint.

Dazai watched him carefully. He felt, somehow, as though he had neither won nor lost this interrogation. The interrogation had hardly been a difficult one to maneuver, and that thought alone put Dazai on edge. Dumbledore was highly intelligent and thoughtful, yet he hadn't questioned any of Dazai's testimony. There was no doubt about it: the headmaster was playing this *very* carefully. He was hiding something, and Dazai *still* didn't know what.

Dazai had escaped major suspicion, but in the long run had he only complicated things more?

This all could have been so much simpler if Mori had only been upfront with him for once!

“I’ll be sure to do that, Sir.”

Dumbledore nodded, but Dazai got the impression that the headmaster didn’t particularly care for him. Sure enough, Dumbledore regarded him with a thoughtful eye before turning to leave the room.

“Severus,” the headmaster said, fingers around the door knob, “if you’ll follow me. We have much to discuss.”

Dazai held back a sigh—Hogwarts was a strange place and it’s people were awfully difficult to deal with. Dumbledore was definitely up to something.

“In a minute, Headmaster.”

Dumbledore merely lifted his chin. Then, without another word, he left the infirmary. The air seemed less oppressive without the older wizard's presence loitering around.

"Rest up," Snape said, stealing Dazai's attention. There was a pressed frown on his face and something deeply uncomfortable in his stiff shoulders. "I'll return to speak with you once we hear back from your father."

"Thanks, Sir."

Snape frowned. He looked to be debating over something before finally saying in a quiet voice, "Your father may decide to have you sent home early."

Dazai tilted his head. Where was Snape going with this? They had already talked about the possibility of his returning home early for medical treatment. He tried to say as much with his face.

The potion professor let out a biting breath. "If for *any reason* you are not comfortable or... or *safe* with the idea of returning home, I want you to let me know as soon as possible. Do you understand?"

Dazai blinked, stupefied.

"Mr. Dazai."

"Ah..." Dazai shook himself. *Why was Snape looking so serious all of a sudden? And what sort of request was that, anyway?* "Okay, Sir."

Snape levelled him with a steady glare before finally nodding. "Good. I have paperwork to do for this whole fiasco. Don't cause any more trouble, Problem Child."

Comfortable at home? What a joke!

At Dazai's cheeky grin, Snape let out a world-weary sigh. A second later, he shut the door closed, leaving Dazai alone in the infirmary's warm silence.

The mafioso fell back into his bed and draped an arm over his eyes. This was a real mess for sure.

Chapter End Notes

Albus "what's the worst that one boy can do" Dumbledore: I have everything under control
Severus "i told you so" Snape: do you now

thanks for your patience! Next chapter will be up???? soon-ish! lol
comments and kudos are very very appreciated ily

Going Home Club

Chapter Summary

Dazai says goodbye.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Welcome back!"

Dazai took a step back before he looked around the room. Streamers were hung around the ceiling and colorful balloons were pooled up around the chairs. For all intents and purposes, the Gryffindor common room looked positively *festive.* He shot a bewildered gaze to Fred and George, who had their arms spread wide.

"What is this?"

"Aw, Snakey!" Fred whined, "It's a welcome back party, obviously!"

"Yeah, didn't you hear us shout *welcome back?* Want us to do it again?"

The yell still echoed in his ears. "Absolutely not." He looked to Blaise, then back to their Gryffindor friends. Ron and Hermione stared back, sheepish. "And that doesn't answer my question. You can't welcome me back since I didn't go anywhere."

"You've been in the infirmary for a whole week now! I think that counts as being away."

"Besides," Fred chimed in, a teasing lilt in his tone, "Ronnie-kins here *really* missed having you around in class. He's been talking about you nonstop—"

"Have not!"

"Au contraire—"

Dazai rolled his eyes while the siblings bickered and teased. Instead, he let his focus shift to the room around him. The Gryffindor common room was dressed up for a party. Even the other Gryffindor students, who held a general distaste for Dazai, seemed to be in good spirits. At the very least, no one was outright glaring at him. Even Angel had briefly stopped by to appreciate the festivities. True to character, the rat had watched with dark eyes for a short while before vanishing off to who-knows-where.

While Dazai was squinting down at a pile of neon pink balloons, he caught Blaise's eye. The other snake looked amused.

“Where did you get this stuff, by the way?” Dazai interrupted Ron, Fred, and George.

“Ah, the party supplies?” When Dazai nodded, George explained, “A little magic here, a little sneaking into storage closets there...”

Fred cut in, “That doesn’t matter. Do you like it?”

Dazai blinked. “The streamers?”

“The party!”

Dazai looked around the room once again. Obnoxiously colored balloons and laughing Gryffindors filled the room. Finally, he let his eyes settle on his group of friends. They looked eager and excited, but most of all *relieved.* Although Dazai still wasn’t fully recovered (the ache in his whole body said as much), he was over the worst of it now. “I guess it’s okay,” he hummed. “I’ve never had a party before, so there’s nothing to compare it to.”

“*What?!”*

Instead of looking pleased with themselves, like Dazai expected, everyone’s faces had dropped into shock.

Hermione stepped forward. “You’ve never had a party before? Not even for a birthday?”

Dazai looked to Blaise for reassurance, but found only a blank, considering gaze there.

No... he’d never been to a party before. Was it that weird? He knew the Port Mafia often threw extravagant banquets and dances, but Dazai had never been allowed to attend. Father was rather insistent about keeping him locked up in his room, instead. Dazai tried not to dwell on it too much. When he asked Mori, the doctor would only describe stiff, formal affairs. Drinking wine, making connections, and talking business. Dazai thought parties sounded awfully boring. But this...

There was a warm feeling in Dazai’s chest.

...this was definitely something different.

“If we knew this was your first party, we would have put more ‘*wow’* into it!”

Dazai mentally turned away from his thoughts to give the twins a flat look. “*Wow?”* He echoed. "Do I want to know what that is?"

“Yeah,” Fred clapped, “there would have been fireworks!”

“Presents!”

“Music!”

“Cake!”

Hermione cleared her throat. “You don’t need any of that to have a *real* party,” she tutted. Then, turning her full attention onto Dazai, she smiled softly. “All it takes to have a successful party is hanging out with good friends. Er... right?”

Ron nodded, emphatic.

“By that measure,” Blaise said, “I think this is a fine party. The streamers were a nice touch, though.”

Dazai hummed. He turned away to face the streamers when his cheeks started to unwittingly heat up. “You're the party experts,” he said, “so I’ll take your word for it.”

A second later, someone threw their weight around Dazai’s shoulders. He jumped slightly at the unexpected touch. Fred looked apologetic, but didn’t let up.

“We’ll just have to make this one extra memorable then!”

Giving him a gentle nudge, Fred guided Dazai through the Gryffindor common room. Dazai fell into a plush armchair with a *thump.* He blinked up at them, both confused and amused at the twin’s pushiness.

Ron plopped down int the seat beside him. He crossed his arms. “Fred, George, stop mother-henning my friend!”

“It’s our duty! As Boss’ self-appointed big brothers.”

“Would it make you feel better if we fussed over you too, Li’l Ronnie?”

Ron immediately turned beet red, flapping his hands out in a frantic dismissal. Of course, that only spurred the twins on in their teasing. They rushed to Ron’s side, worrying over him and mussing up his hair. Ron squawked loudly.

“They’re lively as ever.”

When Dazai smiled, Blaise’s lips quirked up as well.

“I’m not surprised,” he tilted his head back into the chair. It was far comfier than the leathers seats in the Slytherin common room. “Those two could find a way to laugh no matter what.”

That seemed to be the case at least. Dazai had seen Fred and George playing around while they were stealing the Philosopher’s Stone. More than that, they were laughing *now.* Now—while throwing a party for the classmate who had just days before *murdered their teacher.*

They certainly had a way of making dark situations enjoyable.

“ As admirable as that is, they need to take some things more seriously,” Hermione said, settling down on a long sofa. “Studying, for example.”

Dazai rolled his eyes. “Speaking of studying...”

Immediately, Hermione blanched. “Don’t tell me I forgot about a test coming up—”

“You didn’t,” Blaise raised a placating hand. The Gryffindor girl seemed to deflate at once. “Dazai just wants to be annoying, since he doesn’t have to study for finals.”

“Oh.” Hermione let out a breath, then turned a disapproving eye to Dazai. “I understand that it’s because of your health condition, but still..! You haven’t done any assignments, and the headmaster is just *letting* you pass first year?!”

“Ah, is Hermione jealous?”

“That’s not how school is supposed to work!”

“Sure it is.” Dazai waved her off, a wide smirk on his lips. “Maybe you’re just not trying hard enough.”

Hermione let out an obscenely loud squawk. Dazai, wondering how much further he could tease her, started to say something else. However, before he could get too far, the twins interrupted.

“Exempt from finals...” Fred trailed off, sloppily falling over the back of Dazai’s chair. Across the room, Ron looked deeply relieved to have their attention finally off of him.

“We were going to ask if you wanted to sneak into the professors’ offices and see what the finals were covering, but I guess that doesn’t affect you anymore, huh?”

Dazai shrugged. “Best of luck to you.”

“Thanks!”

Stealing test answers... Dazai wondered if they might be able to sell them to the other students. He humored the idea briefly, but quickly disregarded it. If Mori wanted him home early, then Dazai wouldn’t be able to supervise.

Well, maybe next year.

Blaise must have been able to read the mischief on his face, beccause the other snake let out a long sigh. Then, steering Dazai’s focus elsewhere, he casually said, “I just remembered. I have something for you, Boss.”

Dazai blinked, sitting up straighter. A gift?

Around him, the twins, Ron, and Hermione also looked somewhat surprised.

“He doesn’t need a present,” Ron butt in. “Isn’t being exempt from his finals blessing enough?”

“Ah,” Blaise hummed, “it’s not really a present.” At their confused looks, he reached into his cloak. After a second, he pulled out a small object and held it up to Dazai. “Here.”

Palm up, Blaise held out Dazai's old pocket knife. It had been a few weeks since he had last seen it. In that time, Blaise had kept it hidden in his own belongings, steadfast about worrying for Dazai's *well-being* (or some other nonsense). It was a small pocket knife with a black handle. In the light, the blade shined up at them. It must have been cleaned since Blaise confiscated it, because Dazai was certain there had been flecks of his blood on it when he'd last seen it.

"You should take this back," Blaise said, nudging the knife forward again. "Even if I don't regret taking it away from you, it *is* still your knife." He paused, then added, "And on the off chance that your dad *does* want you to go home early... you should have it back."

"When it comes down to it, I guess Blaise isn't really a thief," Dazai commented. He leaned forward to eye the blade. He could still remember how it felt in his hands—the coarse handle sticking into his palm and the sharpened blade slicing into his forearm. Looking at the knife now, Dazai was suddenly struck with a realization. He reached out to push Blaise's outstretched hand back into his chest.

When Blaise opened his mouth to protest, Dazai beamed.

"You know, a lot of organizations—like mafias and gangs—have a sort of ritual," Dazai explained, "that whoever brings you into the gang gives you a personal item of theirs. Something like a coat or a hat that says '*I'm this person's responsibility'* or '*as long as I have this, I'm loyal'."*

Hermione blinked. "Is that real?"

"Sure!" Dazai chuckled, whirling back to Blaise. "Consider that knife my welcome gift for our gang. Now everyone will know that you belong to me!"

"Everyone already knows that, Boss."

Dazai shrugged, flippant. "You'll keep it, though, right?"

Blaise looked at Dazai, then down to the pocket knife. Then, he let out a fond sigh. He slowly lowered his hand, fisting the knife tightly to his palm. "You could just say '*here's a token of our friendship, so don't forget me over break,'* you know?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Blaise."

"Yeah, okay." Blaise rolled his eyes. "I'll hold onto it, Dazai."

"Great!" Dazai clapped. He steadfastly ignored the flustered feeling rising up in his chest at Blaise's words. Instead, he shoved his fingers under his thighs and kicked his feet out childishly.

"Hey!" Fred and George shouted. Dazai's head immediately snapped over to them. "Where's *our* welcome gift, Boss?! Don't we get one too?"

Ron looked between them, smirking. "What about me?"

Hermione laughed. “Or me?”

A grin easily worked its way onto Dazai’s face as he passed over the many faces of his gang members surrounding him. “Ah, I don’t have that many belongings with me.”

“That’s no fair,” Fred teased, “go and grab something for us, Snakey!”

“Yeah, hurry up, Boss! We’re official members too.”

Dazai rolled his eyes, but mentally he was taking stock of what items he kept back in his dorm room. *What items could he gift to his subordinates...*

“I don’t have anything else,” Dazai said finally, racking his brains. And it was true—the only things he had brought from home aside from school supplies were his pocket knife and bandages. Even then, he had run out of bandage rolls a few weeks ago. The only ones he still had were the scratchy bandages he stole from Madam Pomfrey earlier that year.

Fred and George glanced to one another, then let out simultaneous and melodramatic sighs. “Well, I *guess* we can wait.”

“You don’t have a choice,” Dazai told them, amused. He turned to Blaise. “You’ll have to get something for Draco, you know. He’s your responsibility now.”

Blaise brought a hand to his chin in thought as their friends laughed around them.

“...A coat or a hat, huh?”

“Or something like it.” He tried to imagine Draco wearing either of those with a scrunched-up frown. “...maybe not a hat.”

Blaise shot him an amused look, seeming to have caught onto Dazai’s wandering thoughts.

“Speaking of Draco—"

“Children,” a new voice suddenly interrupted.

Their heads shot up. Dazai’s eyes immediately landed on Professor McGonagall at the entryway. Her hand was still poised on the painting frame, leading Dazai to believe that she had only just arrived a second earlier. When she spoke, everyone in the room snapped to attention, even the Gryffindors that weren’t currently celebrating Dazai’s return.

“Madam Pomfrey suggested that you may have all gone somewhere together after leaving the infirmary,” she said, “Though I question the choice of *Gryffindor* common rooms.”

Saying this, McGonagall’s eyes landed pointedly on Blaise and Dazai. Both snakes looked up at her, sheepish but unmoving.

“Good afternoon, Professor.”

“Good afternoon.”

A series of polite greetings rolled around their group. McGonagall nodded in acknowledgment before narrowing her attention.

“Mr. Dazai. May I have a word?”

Dazai shifted in place, already guessing at why the head of the Gryffindor house would be seeking him out. “I’m not in trouble, am I?”

She gave him an unamused look, evidently ignoring the how the twins tittered beside them. “Not this time, Mr. Dazai.” McGonagall cleared her throat. “We received a return letter from your father earlier today. It is his and the headmaster’s agreement that you will return home to Japan immediately.”

Dazai tilted his head, wondering just what Mori had written in the letter.

“*Immediately?!”* Fred and George shouted together.

Hermione frowned. “Is Dazai in some sort of danger staying here, Ma’am?”

The professor’s eyes passed over the gathered students. Seeming to see that their outbursts were only of a friendly concern, McGonagall sighed. “Madam Pomfrey is still worried for your health, Mr. Dazai. The fact that your father is a private practice doctor only makes this transition more practical. However, that is not our only reason for wanting to move forward quickly.”

Dazai’s eyes narrowed. There were a lot of things that could put both Mori and Dumbledore on edge like this. The Death Eaters seeking revenge, for one. Or... Dazai’s recalled his previous conversation with Snape and Dumbledore.

“The media caught wind of the story.”

McGonagall turned a discerning eye onto him, before nodding affirmation. “A teacher is dead and a student is reporting that the Death Eaters have returned,” she summarized in a low voice, “Reporters are already on their way here to speak with you.”

...which explained Mori’s investment in him going home *now.* Controlling the stream of information was one of Mori’s signature moves. Dazai suspected Dumbledore ascribed to the same technique.

Around him, Dazai’s friends paled at the mention of the Death Eaters (with the exception of Blaise, who merely glowered). “When am I leaving?” He pushed onward, more than eager to escape Hogwarts before the reporters arrived.

“In two hours,” McGonagall said.

“Wha—!” Ron’s mouth fell open. “That’s so soon!”

“It is out of my hands. Now, Mr. Dazai,” she said, “Severus is currently gathering your things from your room. I encourage you to make your goodbyes now. Find him once you are finished.”

“Oh...” Hermione deflated.

The twins shared a look before collapsing onto Dazai’s shoulders. “So by ‘immediately’ you really meant *immediately* immediately.”

Dazai worried a frown onto his lips. “Thanks, Ma’am,” he said, distractedly.

McGonagall let out a breath before taking a step towards to door. Opening the doorway, the professor spared them all a final glance. “...I look forward to seeing you next year, Mr. Dazai.”

With that said, McGonagall nodded a farewell. She shut the door behind her.

The gang was silent. After a second, Dazai was the one to break the lingering tension.

“I guess I should get going,” he said. “Thanks for the party. It was short, but I liked it.”

“Isn’t this all a bit too fast?” Ron interjected. He stood. “You only just got better!”

Hermione shook her head. “But he’s *not* better, Ron. That’s why he has to go home early. Right?”

Dazai shrugged, but even that slight movement was sluggish and uncomfortable. It must have shown on his face, because Ron’s fight died abruptly.

“Aww...” George whined.

“Our little Snakey is leaving already, huh?” Fred sniffled dramatically, “We’re going to miss you!”

Dazai sighed into the chair, wanting to rest there a little longer. It certainly wouldn’t hurt to spend his last couple of hours at Hogwarts with his gang.

He couldn’t. There were still a few loose ends to tie up.

He felt a nudge on his arm. When Dazai turned to see who had bumped into him, Blaise offered a small smile.

“I think I saw Draco hanging around in the Slytherin common rooms this morning. He’ll probably still be there if you hurry,” Blaise said. His fingers were wrapped tightly around his knife. The pads of his fingers brushed over the blade in a way that could only be described as fond.

Blaise always knew exactly what Dazai was thinking.

Grateful, Dazai got to his feet. When his head spun, Ron put a steadying arm on his shoulder.

“Off to do business?” George asked.

“Why don’t you keep enjoying the party? Leave the rest to us.”

Dazai shook his head, then brushed off Ron's hold. "You've all done plenty for me." And that much was true. True in a way that Dazai couldn't really explain, because he had never felt so welcome anywhere before now. "And while I'm gone, you're all in charge of keeping the gang together. Blaise will be interim-boss until I return."

If I return—because that was up to Mori. And Mori had never been upfront with his plans in the past. Why would he start with this?

"Dazai..."

"We're going to miss you!"

"Get well soon!"

"You better write me while you're gone!"

Dazai stared, eyes wide, as his friends shot to their feet and drew him into one big hug. He gasped as their warmth wrapped around him. Slowly, he melted into the hug.

All the hands on him, all the smothering, caging touches... and somehow Dazai didn't feel trapped at all.

"This is gross," he said into Fred's chest, the words getting muffled easily. "You're all gross and sentimental *and gross* ."

Ron and Hermione detached themselves from the hug, but Blaise and the twins held on for a moment longer. Blaise was the last one to pull away, an impossible-to-read smile stretching across his face.

"*Feelings are gross,* " Blaise echoed, stepping away, "I know, Dazai. Goodbyes are supposed to be like that."

"Oh. I don't like them," Dazai whined.

The twins chuckled. "I don't think you're supposed to like goodbyes."

"Well," Dazai said, taking a deliberate step towards the door. He ignored the metallic pull on his chest drawing him back to the gang. "Goodbye, then."

Blaise shook his head. "Until next year."

"Right," Dazai laughed, "Until next year."

Dazai slipped through the door before it could close, an aching body and a deep exhaustion making him far slower than usual. Once he was in the Slytherin common room, the dungeon's cold air did nothing for his stiff joints. Dazai made a beeline for the fireplace. A quick glance around the room revealed no one was present. No one except...

As he was sitting, Dazai spotted a smooth bundle of silver-blonde hair peeking over the edge of another sofa.

“You look glum, Boss,” Dazai said, settling into his own chair.

Draco raised a brow. However, he quickly wiped the accommodating look from his face. “Don’t.”

“...Don’t tease you?” Dazai guessed. Meanwhile, he tried to rub some warmth into his fingers. He looked around the room again. Where was everyone? And hadn’t McGonagall said that Snape would be here?

Draco was quiet for long enough that Dazai sat up. He tried to peer into Draco’s half-mast eyes, but found a mask staring back at him there. Still, Dazai thought his expression looked more thoughtful than suspicious. The other snake’s brows were drawn together and there was a thin pull to his lips.

“Don’t call me *Boss,* " Draco said, voice strangely serious. Carefully, he pulled a familiar blue cloth bag from his cloak. Dazai’s eyes locked onto it immediately. “Not when you don’t mean it.”

Dazai stared at the bag. A thrum of power seemed to roll out of it. The magic buzzed in his ears.

The Philosopher’s Stone.

There was no doubt about it: Draco knew what secrets the bag was hiding. Dazai let out a breath as he mentally shifted track. Plan A (simply asking for the bag back) was clearly bust —Blaise’s trust in Draco hadn’t gone as far as the boy would have liked to think. Luckily, Dazai was adept at rolling with the punches.

“Seriously, Dazai,” Draco said, cutting him off mid-breath, “What in the world have you and those Gryffindor nobodies been up to all year?!”

“This and that,” Dazai said, eyeing the bag before turning his full attention to Draco’s face, “I see you opened the bag.”

“Of course I did! You’re my subordinate, after all. Or...” Draco trailed off, mumbling, “...or at least you should be.”

The cloth bag swung in the air, back and forth. A pendulum ticking down one second after the next.

“Ah... are you jealous that I didn’t ask for your help to get that?”

Draco whirled on him with a glare.

Dazai explained, “The reason I didn’t involve you... well, you're not very trustworthy, Draco. It’s nothing personal.”

“That’s *incredibly* personal.”

“Do you even know what that is?” Dazai redirected, tilting his chin to indicate the bag.

Draco stilled. Then, slowly, he lowered the bag to rest on his leg. He kept a hand hovered protectively over it. “...I do. It’s the... you *stole* the Philosopher’s Stone!”

Dazai carefully kept his expression blank. Still, he couldn’t help his eyebrows rising at the answer.

“Don’t give me that look. The Malfoy family is exceptionally well educated.”

Shaking his head, Dazai offered a half-smile. “It’s not about smarts.” He pivoted, “who told you about it?”

After all, Dazai had been forced to sneak around the Forbidden Forest and the restricted section of the library just to learn what the Philosopher’s Stone was. Not to mention the time he spent interrogating Hagrid and subsequently *dodging* interrogations from Snape. All the trouble that Dazai had to go through, there was *no way* Draco had done the same and escaped suspicion.

Which meant, once again, this Philosopher’s Stone business was significantly more complicated than Mori had led Dazai to believe.

Joy.

“Like that’s any of *your* business.” Draco looked down to the stone on his lap before Dazai could catch his expression. When he looked up a moment later, there was nothing distinguishable on his face to read besides a mild discomfort. “Would it kill you to act like a normal student for once?”

“Probably,” Dazai said, distractedly. His mind was elsewhere; still dissecting Draco’s words.

None of the professors would tell a student about the stone, Dazai knew. And he was fairly sure he would have noticed if another student was looking into the stone, too. But that only left someone outside of Hogwarts to have filled Draco in one the Stone’s location. *Hmm....*

The only other person Dazai had ever heard Draco talk about was his father.

“Are you taking it, then?” Dazai asked. “Giving the stone to your—for a lack of a better word—boss?”

Draco noticeably jumped at the word ‘boss.’ Not in a way that made Dazai think he had hit the mark, but more like Draco hadn’t considered that particular phrasing before.

If Draco wouldn't give the stone back... Dazai's fingers instinctively reached for a knife that wasn't there. Would he fight... no—*kill* Draco for the stone?

...Could he?

Mori wanted the stone. He had instructed Dazai, under no uncertain terms, to retrieve the Philosopher's Stone for the Port Mafia. Obviously, if Draco didn't want to give him back the stone, he would have to take it by force. But... but the idea curdled in Dazai's stomach. It didn't sit right at all. The disconnect between what he *should do* and what he *wanted to do* was so staggering, it felt treasonous to think at all.

Dazai's friend watched him for a moment, seeming to contemplate something deeply troubling. There was a discomfort on Draco's face when he spoke. A silent war going on in the pit of his stomach and rising up in his throat. Dazai wondered that the same expression wasn't on his face, as well.

Finally, Draco shook himself. "I should."

Should.

" I should take the stone for myself," Draco repeated, just as Dazai was thinking, "*I should be able to kill you, but..."*

But I kind of like you, I guess?

" But Blaise said I'm a member of your gang now. So I'm *unfortunately* loyal to you," Draco sighed, the tension all but melting from his body as he made his decision. The quirk to his lips was shaky, but the teasing bite in his tone was not, "Right, *Boss?"*

"...Oh."

Draco tossed the bag across the gap, and Dazai caught it with unthinking hands.

"That's all you have to say? *'Oh'* ?! I just professed my loyalty to your stupid friend gang and you don't have anything inspiring to say? Your group is full of blood traitors! I'm really making a sacrifice here."

Dazai had to blink himself free from his thoughts. These Hogwarts kids would never stop surprising him with their ugly sentimentality. With a burst of warmth in his chest, Dazai wondered if he hadn't caught some feelings as well.

The bag in his hand burst with power. Dazai was careful to hide it in his cloak, hesitant about accidentally nullifying the stone. "I'm just surprised the high-and-mighty Mr. Malfoy just admitted to being my subordinate, is all," he lied. "You were bossing me around just last week."

"Maybe I'm just resigned to the fact that you're never going to actually do the things I tell you to do," Draco said with a huff. "You made an *awful* subordinate."

"Aww, thanks!"

“That’s not a compliment and you know it. I’ve poured too much of my *incredibly valuable* time into you to just drop you no matter how horrible you are.”

Dazai laughed. “Welcome to the gang, regardless.”

“Yeah,” Draco breathed out, briefly averting his gaze, “thanks for having me. Now are you going to tell me why in *Merlin’s name* you stole the Philosopher’s Stone?”

Dazai tilted his head, considering. “Because I wanted it,” he said. Spreading his fingers out, he added, “if you want me to tell you about it, you have to answer my question first. You already knew what the Philosopher’s Stone was. Why?”

When Draco was silent, Dazai hazarded a guess.

“Did your father tell you, by chance?”

Draco’s head shot up, shock written clear across his face. “How did you know?”

“You talk about him often enough,” Dazai reasoned, “and if anyone was going to know about the stone, it would be someone rich and connected like him. I know the type.”

Taking a moment, to collect his thoughts, Draco leveled him with an assessing look. Only after a few seconds did he admit, “My father... didn’t exactly *tell* me that the Philosopher’s Stone was being kept here. I...overheard him talking about it on the phone with someone one day. A few weeks before school started.”

Dazai blinked. Draco must have read the confusion on his face.

“I was surprised too! Someone sent Father one of your muggle cell phones. He would take calls from it every so often and always seemed especially tense afterwards.” Draco drew in a breath, then let it out like he was spilling secrets from his lips. Like once they had started to come out, the truths just wouldn’t stop. Still, Dazai got the feeling that Draco was holding something back. "My father..."

He trailed off, clearly fighting with himself over whether or not to continue.

Dazai tilted his head, appraising. “I trusted you with the stone, the least you can do is to trust me with whatever else it is you’re thinking about. I’m your boss, aren’t I?”

Draco bit his lip, then shook himself. “I’ll tell you, but only because I’m feeling generous today.”

“Sure.”

“It *is* about you, anyway. I suppose you have a right to know.”

Dazai sat up straight.

...What?

“ During one of my father’s phone calls, I heard him mention your name.”

Seriously: *What?*

Dazai felt his eyes narrow as he tried to work through what that could mean.

“My father didn’t explicitly tell me to keep an eye on you, but I figured I would do the Malfoy family a favor and keep watch,” Draco explained, drawing a vague shape in the air with his hand. He looked tense and upset. Dazai sympathized—it was an *awful* feeling when your superior didn’t loop you in on their plans. “When you were sorted into Slytherin despite being a muggleborn, I took it upon myself to keep our housemates from murdering you.”

Processing the information, Dazai said, “Thanks, I think.”

“It was mostly for my father, but your welcome.”

Dazai fell back into his chair, a puff of air escaping from his lungs as he did so. As per usual, he was wrapped up in someone else’s plot. Thinking Draco’s explanation over, Dazai couldn’t help but to feel more annoyed than worried.

After all, there was only one person Dazai was familiar with who both knew about magic and frequently made suspicious phone calls. It was the same person who, without fail, refused to tell Dazai anything about this job.

Mori.

What a bastard.

“Of course,” Draco was still talking, “you’re impossible to keep an eye on. I look away for one second, and you run off to start a gang, steal an ancient artifact, and kill our professor.” He looked to the floor at the mention of Quirrell, but only momentarily.

Dazai ignored the slip. He didn’t care one-way-or-the-other about what he had done to Quirrell and he was too focused on the current topic to bother putting on a mask. “Have you been reporting back to your father about me?”

Draco shifted in his seat. Then, surprisingly, he shook his head. “This is more of a—”

“Pet project,” Dazai filled in.

A grin stretched across Draco’s face. “Exactly.”

Laughing lightly, Dazai wrung his hands together before letting them fall slack on his lap. “Okay,” he said after a second. “What a mess.”

“...that’s it?” Draco asked, smile dropping just as soon as it had come, “I’ve been spying on you all year and you give up just like that?”

Dazai raised a brow. “That’s it. I would barely call what you did spying, anyway.” He couldn’t find it in himself to feel betrayed. Not given their situation. Especially not,

considering... “Besides, I have a feeling we’re in the same boat this time, Draco.”

Just another item on the list of things Mori wasn’t telling him. Dazai couldn’t even find it in himself to feel annoyed now. He just felt tired. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he tried to massage some of that stress away.

In the end, it always came back to Mori and the dozens of things he wasn’t telling Dazai.

Draco’s brows furrowed, clearly not knowing what to make of Dazai’s answer. However, Dazai brushed off any more of that conversation with a wave of his hand. “Hey,” he said, looking around the room once more, “Where is everyone, anyway? It’s the middle of the day during the weekend.”

Not that he didn’t appreciate the solitude. He and Draco wouldn’t have been able to have this conversation otherwise. Still, compared to the bustle of the Gryffindor room just shortly before, the difference was quite jarring. Dazai was used to this sort of quiet in the Slytherin rooms only during the late, late nights and early mornings.

Draco stared at him for a moment, brows pinched together in thought. Whatever was bothering him, he shook it off with a sigh. He puffed out his chest. “I asked them to leave.”

“...you can do that?”

“*I* can. They wouldn’t listen if *you* tried telling them where to go.” Draco lifted his chin.

Dazai smirked. “And it doesn’t *also* have anything to do with Professor Snape being here, does it?”

Draco twitched, “No.” He scowled. “How did you even know Professor Snape was here? He’s in the bedrooms.”

Glancing to the side, Dazai saw that the bedroom doors were still pressed firmly closed. Snape was just beyond it, probably picking up some of the textbooks Dazai had left lying around from the other night. He briefly worried that Snape might find something damning, but didn’t think so. Dazai was always proactive in keeping his space clean and nondescript. Besides, Dazai didn't have many belongings to begin with.

He shook himself from his thoughts. “I’m going home today—I'm sure Blaise can fill you in on the details. Professor Snape is supposed to meet me here.”

“*Today?!* "

Dazai snorted. “That’s exactly how the others reacted, too.” Maybe Draco would fit into the gang better than Dazai had initially suspected. Thinking this, Dazai continued, “Don’t make trouble for the gang while I’m gone. I don’t want to hear that you and Ron are fighting again.”

“As long as he and those blood traitors stay in line—”

“Blaise is second in command, so just do what he says,” Dazai said, a puff of amusement on ghosting over his lips. “You aren’t ranked high enough to issue orders.”

Draco made a face, but didn’t press the issue. Still, Dazai got the distinct impression that Draco’s condescending attitude couldn’t be tamed just like that. Maybe giving Draco something concrete to work on for the gang would settle him down a bit.

“Say, your nosey old man is freakishly rich, right?”

Draco frowned, but nodded affirmation.

“Fantastic. I’ll need you to do me and the gang a favor, then. Consider it your first assignment.”

He waited for Draco’s slow nod before explaining.

“I need you to take care of a dragon for me.”

Draco blinked once, then twice. “...a what?”

“Just until summer break is over! I can’t exactly take it home with me, and Ron’s parents will probably throw a fit once they realize I let one of their sons keep an illegal dragon as a pet. Rich people get away with worse things than illegal dragon ownership all the time.”

“*Merlin’s beard,* you really *do* need someone to supervise you. You have a *dragon?!* ”

Dazai pouted. “Don’t just say that so casually to your boss! You’ll take care of Egg, won’t you?”

Draco blinked once, then twice. Falling back into his seat, he raised a hand to cover a laugh. "That’s an awful name, Dazai.”

Everything moved very quickly after that. Dazai only chatted with Draco for another few minutes before Snape returned from the bedrooms. There had been a suitcase in his hands and an odd look in his eyes, but Dazai quickly wrote it off. He was far too busy worrying over this latest turn of events to care what trivial thing Snape was hung up on today.

Thoughts about returning home—about Mori and Malfoy Sr.—carried Dazai out of Hogwarts castle and all the way to the owlery to pick up Featherbrain. Dazai clutched the bird’s cage in both his hands, straining every few seconds when it flapped and shook. He struggled with the cage for long enough that Snape, after a few minutes, let out a grievous sigh and took hold of the bird cage himself. Dazai gratefully grabbed onto the smaller, less obtrusive suitcase in return. Holding a case that didn’t fight back made the walk across the bridge to the train station much easier.

Dazai looked around, noticing a few other passengers boarding alongside them.

Snape caught his eye. He gestured for Dazai to board the train, only speaking once his student obeyed. “Hogsmeade Village is within walking distance to Hogwarts. Seeing as this is many wizards’ daily commute, I expect you not to bother the other passengers.”

Dazai stopped at a compartment and looked to Snape. When the professor made a noise of agreement, Dazai took a seat. Snape sat across from him. He slid the compartment door closed behind them and Featherbrain’s cage beside Dazai.

A few moments passed, but Dazai didn’t release his grip on the suitcase. Mindlessly, he clenched and unclenched his fingers around the handle a few times.

“I’m always a pleasure to be around, Sir.”

Snape raised a brow, clearly not enthused.

“Featherbrain, less so,” he continued, motioning to the owl. As expected, it *hooted* loudly in response. It was an obnoxious cacophony of *coos* that had yet to stop since they had picked the awful thing up. “But that can’t be helped.”

Snape glanced at Featherbrain. There was annoyance written clear across his face that Dazai deeply sympathized with.

The mafioso jumped when, within the minute, the train abruptly started beneath them. It chugged slowly forward before picking up pace. The steady rhythm of rails echoed around the compartment. Glancing out the window, Dazai watched as Hogwarts grew smaller and smaller in the distance. It wasn’t long until it was nothing more than a speck of sand to squint at.

It all felt so... *final.* Saying a wordless goodbye to the life Dazai had come to really appreciate. A life away from home. Where he had his own friends and his own objectives. It was something Dazai had never *had* before. Something he never thought he *would* have. He almost felt sad to see it go.

Almost.

There was a bigger picture at play. Mori, the Philosopher’s Stone, the Death Eaters and Voldemort, and now with the Malfoy family... Dazai could appreciate sentimentality only while he had sentimental things in his grasp.

Or maybe this cold feeling was just a product of having to see Mori again so soon. Regardless...

Those dark thoughts swirled and mingled in his head, drawing a long frown across Dazai’s features. His fingers dragged across the suitcase.

When Dazai finally turned his focus back inside the train, Snape was watching him with narrowed eyes.

"...What?"

Snape's frown deepened.

"...What, *Sir?"*

The potion's professor sighed, and Dazai felt himself tense up unwittingly.

"Have you thought any more about what I said?"

Dazai paused, mentally sorting through all of their previous conversations.

…Nothing. He couldn't remember Snape having asked him to think about anything important recently. After all, Dumbledore had lead the Philosopher's Stone/Quirrell interrogation.

"You'll have to remind me, Sir. What was I supposed to be thinking about?"

Snape stared at him. Dazai met his eyes head on, only looking away a moment later when Snape let out another weary breath. There was an odd look on the professor's face. He almost looked...

Sick?

Snape seemed to bodily steel himself, silently warring over how to phrase his next sentence. Dazai felt himself frown in anticipation. He wasn't too worried—there was no way Snape had found out about the truth behind the Philosopher's Stone, right? Which meant this was probably something *worse.*

One of Snape tedious, sentimental, protective things again.

"Are you safe at home?"

Dazai's spine snapped straight, momentarily shocked at how blunt the question was. Snape's attention held strong as he refused to look away for even a second. Quickly, Dazai scrambled to cover up the astonishment on his face. A pleasant, if shaky, smile replaced it.

The thought echoed again in his head: *What sort of question is that supposed to be?!*

"Oh," Dazai hummed, playing up his childish persona. He looked to the window, where a blur of winter branches were nothing more than grey smudges outside. "That again?"

"Yes, *that again,"* Snape said. "Answer the question, Problem Child."

"Uh—"

Old scars stung beneath his bandages, but...

But Mori would never let him *die.* The good doctor would always patch him back up. Dazai was just as safe at home as he was anywhere else.

Featherbrain made a too-loud sound, as if reading Dazai's thoughts and calling him on an obvious lie.

He shot the bird a glare. It chose to flap around stupidly rather than look at all intimidated.

"Mr. Dazai."

"I'm fine," he said hastily. "I don't know where you get all of these ideas from, Professor. Are you sure you aren't just missing me already—"

"This is serious," Snape said. He was wearing that ill-looking expression still. That tight pinch between his brows seemed only to have darkened. "Regardless of what the headmaster may have led you to believe, the safety of my students is priority. I will be as blunt with you as possible, because I believe both of us have been avoiding some important topics for too long. "

Dazai nodded mutely. His fingers fell from the suitcase, searching blindly for his bandaged wrist to scratch at.

Instantly, Dazai realized doing this was a mistake.

"*That* being one of them. I have avoided forcing you to discuss your self-harming tendencies because it clearly makes you uncomfortable." Dazai opened his mouth to protest, but Snape cut him off. "And that is my fault. It is my responsibility as you teacher to keep you safe—including from yourself. I put my own hesitance to have this conversation above your safety."

When Dazai didn't make to counter this, Snape said, "You came to Hogwarts malnourished, covered in bandages, and clearly attempting to manipulate the people around you. I have seen you have panic attacks and flinch away from your professors. You understand that my concerns for your welfare and home-life are not coming out of nowhere."

Dazai nodded thoughtless, then quickly corrected himself. None of those things were *weird.* That was just how things were in the mafia!

Some of the outrage must have been visible on his face, because Snape suddenly choked on a breath.

"This is *exactly* why I should have forced this conversation earlier."

"You're misunderstanding," Dazai said abruptly. He had to turn Snape off of this train off thought before it got itself too wrapped up in the intricacies of Dazai's criminal life. Before it wound up hurting Mori's schemes.Or before Snape ended up being pulled *into* one of said schemes.

"Then explain it to me," Snape said.

"I—"

Words caught below his tongue—the answer a peach pit lodged in his throat.

“You’re misunderstanding,” he repeated.

How come Dazai could spin a fantastic half-truth about the Philosopher’s Stone, but the second someone asked about *him,* Dazai could barely force out even one word? What a cruel twist of fate.

(*You’re misunderstanding,* something deep and dark and with a voice like Mori’s cooed, *it’s supposed to be like this.*)

The metal bars of Featherbrain’s cage rattled, sounding like claws on steel. Dazai felt the harsh clattering in his bones.

Snape let out another strained sigh. When Featherbrain finally settled down into a quiet hooting commentary, he said, “You don’t have to tell me everything right now. We can deal with all of that later.”

Dazai paused, waiting for the catch.

“All I need from you right now is an answer. I’ll take care of everything from there.” Snape sucked in a breath. “Are you safe at home?”

“Yes," Dazai answered immediately.

“Mr. Dazai—"

He stared forward, eyes hard. “Yes. I am.”

They lapsed into an uncomfortable silence. Even Featherbrain seemed to recognize the tense atmosphere and kept its bird beak snapped shut for once.

The train tracks clattered loudly underfoot. It was a steady heartbeat rhythm—just fast enough to match the tense air in their compartment.

“How far is the station?”

Snape jerked out of his thoughts, pinched brow going slack with some other emotion. The second he registered what Dazai had asked, however, a shadow fell across his face. “You can’t run from this conversation.”

“Can’t I?” Dazai asked with a flippant wave of his hand. “I told you it’s fine, so there’s no reason to keep talking about it, Sir.”

The barely suppressed growl in Dazai’s tone seemed to steal Snape’s voice away. The professor was silent for a long moment. Dazai considered distracting Snape with a joke, but decided that it wouldn’t go over well. Not with someone like Snape, who had demonstrated in the past an unwillingness to let things go. He remembered their previous interrogations with an unsmiling sigh.

In fact, Dazai recalled with a jolt, the only times Snape had ever let him off the hook for something of this magnitude was when something bigger was at stake. Like finding Quirrell.

Or following behind Dumbledore like an obedient mutt.

“Problem Child—”

“Do you think the media will follow me back to Yokohama?” Dazai interrupted swiftly.

Snape startled back briefly, before scowling. Something told Dazai that Snape knew exactly what he was trying to do. Regardless, the potion master leaned back into his seat, deflated. “It is possible,” he said, “but unlikely. The public merely knows that a student is returning home early. Unless they break into Hogwarts to steal your records, they should have no knowledge of where you live.”

“That’s reassuring,” Dazai said, tilting his chin up.

Or, it *would* have been reassuring. Had Dazai himself not explored first-hand how lax Hogwarts security was. Sneaking around forbidden areas past curfew was a joke.

If the disbelief was on his face, Snape didn’t ask about it. He merely commented, “Hogwarts... *I* will do everything I can to protect you.”

Dazai raised a brow.

“In any capacity,” Snape continued. “Be it from the media or a professor. Or something at home.”

“...I’ll keep my eye out for any reporters.”

Snape stared at him for a second, then sighed. “Send the school a letter if anything happens.”

Dazai gave a nonchalant thumbs-up.

Having each said their parts, they lapsed into silence. Only the sound of owl screeches and railroad clatter echoed around the compartment.

Every few minutes, Snape would shoot Dazai a glance. The mafioso carefully kept his expression mostly blank, only letting some of his obvious discomfort show through when Snape’s gaze would linger too long.

He wondered what the potion master was really thinking. Just what had brought on his renewed onslaught of concerns, for example.

Finally (finally!) the train rolled to a slow stop. Looking out the window, Dazai saw the Platform Nine and Three-Quarters station come into view. It wasn’t nearly as bustling as when he had last visited, but there was no small amount of people present today. There were quite a few people walking around. Dazai didn’t recognize any of them.

“I thought Mori was going to be here,” Dazai said with a hum, searching the area slowly. He steadfastly ignored the tight feeling in his chest.

“Your father is a muggle. I expect he will be waiting outside the magic barrier.”

Pretending not to hear the snarl in Snape's voice, Dazai nodded. Thinking back, he did remember that there was a magical brick wall separating the magical world from the non-magical one. He'd run through it face first at the time, following Ron's guidance without a thought. Now, though, Dazai wanted to pick the spell apart piece by piece. He wanted to figure out exactly how it worked and—more specifically—how it interacted with No Longer Human.

When Dazai turned away from the window, Snape was still talking.

"I would like to have a word with you father before leaving you in his care."

Dazai shrugged. He waited for Snape to stand before doing so himself. Thoughtlessly, Dazai let himself fall into step behind his professor. He ignored the small glance this earned him and instead focused on pulling his suitcase up to his side.

Snape sighed, but guided him out of the train regardless.

Stepping out of the train, Dazai squinted against the light. He raised a hand to shield his eyes and look around. Unlike at the other station, Station Nine and Three-Quarters was a lot more populated. It was no surprise—there were other magical trains here leading to other magical locations that Dazai could only begin to guess at. There were a few people milling about on the wall and even more impatiently waiting by the boarding area.

Dazai took a small step closer to Snape as the older man carefully guided him through a throng of strangers.

With a start, Dazai realized that he was getting a few odd looks. A glance here. A raised brow there. Something churned in his stomach.

"They recognize you as a Hogwarts student," Snape said suddenly, jarring Dazai from his observations. He looked up to his professor, eyes asking. "You can imagine many of the wizards here are previous Hogwarts students themselves, and it is practically unheard of for a student to drop out part-way through the year."

Dazai frowned. "Nosey."

Snape smirked briefly before replacing the expression with a scowl of his own. "Indeed."

They passed through the station quickly. Although Dazai could hardly remember how to navigate the station, Snape was clearly familiar. It wasn't until Dazai saw a man run straight through a brick wall that he recognized where they were exactly.

"It's the same way out as it is in, then?"

Snape spared him a glance. "Yes. You—"

Before he could get another word out, a voice called out over the crowd, "Severus Snape! Could I take your statement for the Daily Prophet?"

Dazai blinked, startled when Snape placed a hand on his shoulder and shoved him behind his back.

“Sir..?”

Snape ground his teeth. “The Daily Prophet is a newspaper,” he explained under his breath, “They’re faster than we thought.”

Dazai hummed. He peeked his head around Snape’s side to watch as a pale-haired, bubbly-looking woman pushed her way through a body of people. They didn’t seem to pay her any mind as she shouted and shoved. A pair of vivid red glasses were perched on her nose, but didn’t shake no matter how much she moved. She came to a stop inches from Snape’s face.

“Miss Skeeter,” Snape said, lip curling. “Hogwarts has no interest in giving your paper a statement at this time.”

“Well, I won’t tell if you won’t,” Skeeter said, a red-lipped smile splitting across her face. With a flick of her hand, a small notebook levitated up to her side. A feathered quill floated up behind it and began frantically writing something down.

Trying to read what the magic quill was writing, Dazai leaned further around Snape. However, the second he moved, the woman’s eyes snapped straight to him.

“Oh! This must be our student of the year. Attacked by a teacher then killed him before he could do worse... the people are *very* interested in your story!” Her teeth bared into a smile, snow-white below blood-red lips. She leaned forward until she was practically smothering Dazai. “Rita Skeeter—correspondent with the Daily Prophet. I don’t think I caught your name.”

Before Dazai could even think about responding, Snape stepped in front of him to block Rita’s view. “That would be because Hogwarts has yet to release a statement on the matter. You can wait for the official release like everyone else.”

Rita waved him off while the quill continued to write frantically. “You must have been very scared, poor thing,” she ignored Professor Snape, speaking directly to Dazai still. “Are the rumors true? Was Quirinus Quirrell associated with the Death Eaters? Did he say anything to you about You-Know-Who? Tell me, in his final moments, did Quirrell have any words to share with you?”

Quirrell had begged for his master.

Dazai’s eyes narrowed and his lips thinned. He didn’t respond to Rita’s prodding and was rewarded for his silence a second later when Snape growled.

“Miss Skeeter, cease this incessant questioning before I make you.”

However, rather than looking worried, Rita’s beam grew ten-fold. Her quill scratched out something with renewed fervor. “Hogwarts is being very protective of this incident. Am I to take that to mean there is a greater conspiracy at play?”

“No,” Snape said, shortly. He must have realized that arguing was a lost cause, because he didn’t try to push Rita away again. Instead, he tilted his head back. “Student,” he said, carefully censoring Dazai’s name, “The entrance to Platform nine-and-three-quarters is the same as the entrance. I will give Miss Skeeter a *brief* statement. I trust you can show yourself out.”

Dazai nodded mutely. When he focused, he could feel the magical entrance from where they stood. He thought about making some teasing remark to Snape, but held his tongue. He wasn’t sure how much influence the Daily Prophet had or if it was the type of paper to overemphasize and stretch the truth to dangerous extents.

“Actually, if I could get a statement from the kid as well—”

Snape grunted. He moved in place, stopping Skeeter from stepping around him.

Dazai took that as his cue to leave. With a whispered, “bye, Sir,” he hurried away from Snape and Rita Skeeter. By now, quite a few people at the station were watching the proceedings. This wasn’t helped by the fact that Skeeter was practically yelling for him to come back and answer her questions. Dazai skipped across the stone, trying his best to ignore everyone. He came to a stop just in front of a tall, brick wall. He could feel the magic oozing off of it and tickling No Longer Human.

He spared a final glance over his shoulder and saw that Snape was still attempting to block Rita’s view. Her expression was somewhere between furious and manic as she took Snape’s statement. Judging by her frantic looks Dazai’s way, Snape's interview was hardly the goldmine she was looking for. Dazai grimaced when they briefly locked eyes.

Turning away from them, Dazai launched himself through the brick wall portal. The sudden overwhelming waterfall of magic bit at him like a million hungry gnats. He scrunched his eyes tight in pain and discomfort. The sensation was *too much* and *too fast* for him to fully process any of the magical signatures.

Dazai only opened his eyes once more when the bustle of muggle society filled in his ears.

He pried them open slowly, squinting at the light and groaning at the sound of trains, taxis, and yelling pedestrians. Flashy shirts and harried businessmen were once a normal sight to him. Now, after having lived among robed wizards with pompous attitudes, Dazai almost did a double take.

And, for seemingly the first time in *months,* the constant scream of magic in Dazai’s head settled into an almost silent hum.

Unfortunately, he was unable to bask in the newly rediscovered peace.

A passerby bumped into Dazai’s shoulder, jarring him back half-a-step. He barely steadied himself from falling back through the portal before another, serious-looking person clipped his arm. They each shot him a sharp, judging glance as they passed. His spine snapped ramrod straight. A scowl drew itself across Dazai’s face, easily overwhelmed.

Unbidden, the thought shot through his head:

I want to go home.

Only it didn't feel like "home" in this scenario meant Yokohama. No—It meant Hogwarts. With Blaise and the twins and everyone else that for some *absurd reason* stuck by his side no matter what.

Dazai bit his tongue. He could *never* voice that thought aloud.

Burying that feeling as deep as he could, Dazai quickly maneuvered himself around the swarms of people. He finally came to rest against the station walls, letting out a deeply aggrieved breath. Unlike the last time he had been here, there were no other confused Hogwarts students searching around. The sheer absurdity of his situation only fully settled in when a fifth passerby shot Featherbrain an odd look.

Right. Having a pet owl wasn't at *all* normal in the non-magical world.

(Having a *dragon* was even stranger.)

Dazai took a deep, steadying breath as he folded himself slightly over the owl's cage. It hooted noisily in protest, but he was mostly numb to the cacophony of sounds by now. Judging by the glances he received, everyone else here was *not.*

Not that Featherbrain cared to stop either way.

"I thought I heard a familiar owl's screech."

A cold chill ran down Dazai's spine. He froze in place as the voice washed over him, fingers tensing harshly around his suitcase and cage.

"Ah," Mori chuckled, "you don't look excited to see me. I do hate to see what fraternizing at Hogwarts has done to you. If it weren't to the Port Mafia's benefit, I'd keep you at my side forever."

Dazai's entire body suddenly felt very cold and tense, but he forced himself to look up.

Mori smiled down at him. The man looked the same as ever: a knife-sharp smile, assessing red eyes, and shiny, dark hair. "Your hair has grown out," he commented, raising a hand to twirl one of Dazai's curls around his finger. He didn't seem to notice when Dazai flinched. "It's cute. Although I think your father would prefer the clean look you used to have. You'll cut it before we return."

The order snapped Dazai out of his stupor, jarring his thoughts around into something more familiar. He scowled and slapped the doctor's hand away, earning a played-out pout in return. "Professor Snape wanted to talk with you, but he got held up. Let's go."

Mori laughed. He looked around the station for a moment, but didn't seem surprised to hear about Snape. "Eager to get home, I see."

“Eager to get out of the crowd,” Dazai countered. Then, before Mori could say something annoying, he continued, “Unless you want me to hand over a *certain artifact* in the middle of a busy train station.

The Philosopher’s Stone pounded steadily in Dazai’s pocket. But as eager as he was to give it to Mori and get away from the magic-induced headache, Dazai was actually more concerned with escaping the shoulders bumping into him constantly. Someone sent Featherbrain another odd look and Dazai shuffled uncomfortably in place.

Mori must have seen through Dazai’s deflection, but he didn’t press except to smile, amused. He placed a stiff hand on Dazai’s shoulder to guide the boy through the throngs of people. Dazai silently let himself be dragged along. He nearly tripped attempting to carry all of his belongings, but Mori didn’t offer a helping hand even when Featherbrain loudly protested the rough treatment.

Dazai felt it somewhere deep. He was under Mori’s thumb again. And although he had never truly been free, even at Hogwarts, Dazai had almost convinced himself that…

No. Never mind.

His expression was a familiar blank mask when Mori sat him down in a long, black limousine. The door shut with a bang, enclosing them in shadow. The limo’s engine was smooth and silent as it drove them towards something inevitably darker.

There was no major fuss over Dazai’s early departure from Hogwarts. Aside from a few curious questions, Severus was able to easily field his students' attention. It probably helped that his more troublesome students were already filled in on the situation. *Merlin knew* he didn’t have the mental capacity to deal with Dazai’s troublesome crew right now. Dazai meeting the Weasley twins was truly a match made straight in Hell.

But for all Hogwarts was relatively calm, Severus’ mind was in turmoil.

He held the letter in his white-knuckled hands. It was a wrinkled pieced of white parchment with swirling black ink dancing across it. Most of the page was illegible now. The edges of the page were blackened and burnt—a relic of whatever fire-breathing *thing* had wreaked the Slytherin room earlier that year. Holes were burnt across the page.

But there it was, held tight in Severus’ hands. Unreadable as most of it was, it still made his insides feel sick and sticky.

A burnt letter addressed to Dazai found forgotten under the boy’s bed.

Though most of the letter was unreadable, what he had been able to make out was...

Concerning, to say the least.

The first complete sentences Severus was able to make out had frozen him in place:

"After all I've given you, it would be such a bother for you to fail me now. This is no longer a request, Dazai. Neither your father nor I will tolerate failure. You won't be returning home if you don't do this, understand? Not in one piece, at least, and that wouldn't be cute at all."

Those words, despite being far too vague to draw meaning from, had sent a chill up Severus' spine. They felt so *cold* and so *demanding. They felt like a threat.* The sick feeling in Severus' chest was only doubled when he tried to guess at the meaning. "*Failure..."* was the writer talking about Dazai's grades, or something different?

The rest of the letter was burnt and illegible until further down the page where the author seemed to completely change their perspective. The threats written above were replaced by looping letters and I's dotted with hearts. It was jarring.

"*It's a bit too large for Elise, but that's what I have you for. You always have looked adorable in white. You're not pure like that at all."*

That sentence alone had filled Severus with such a disturbed feeling that he had actually needed to stop reading for a few minutes. It *could* be innocent—more than half the letter was unreadable, after all. Without context, he couldn't be certain. But something in Severus' gut was screaming at him *wrong, wrong, wrong!*

It was signed only "M." Severus had squinted down at the initial for a long moment before remembering with a pang in his chest that Dazai's father's name was Mori. But... something about that didn't make sense, either. Hadn't the writer mentioned that they *weren't* Dazai's father? If so, then who was the author?

The rest of the letter was nothing more than a smattering of words and phrases without context. Large burns and claw scratches made any other full sentences illegible. Words like, "check-up," "ability," and "port," all meant nothing without the presence of what was supposed to surround them.

What sort of vile person was Dazai involved with? And how had he been *stupid* enough to let all of his student's red flags go ignored?

He was an idiot. And worse than that: Severus was *too* attached to the issue at hand. Attached enough that he was willing to let Dazai's discomfort cloud his vision. Enough that he didn't push for fear of hurting the boy—when *not pushing* was the reason things had ended like this. The Philosopher's Stone missing, Quirrell dead, Voldemort in the wind…

Dazai in his abuser's clutches without so much as a fight on Severus' part.

The sound of stone scraping abruptly cut his thoughts off.

He pushed off of the wall and turned to watch the door slowly open. A gargoyle statue stared him down with cobblestone eyes.

Albus was ready to see him now.

Drawing in a deep breath, Severus walked up the spiral staircase laid out before him. He entered Dumbledore's office with a knock. The headmaster had brushed of Severus' concerns for Dazai in the past, but looking at this letter now, he had no choice but to do something.

Right?

...What kind of awful school was Hogwarts that Severus had room to doubt that?

Albus' back was to him, so Severus couldn't read what sort of expression was written there. The various knickknacks on the shelf bounced and rolled around, propelled by a magic he couldn't see. Whatever they were had captured the headmaster's attention fully. Snape glared at a particularly colorful one before turning to shut the door firmly closed behind him.

A phoenix watched him from the desk with two shiny eyes.

"Is the boy safely returned home, Severus?"

"I saw him off myself. The Daily Prophet is as fast as always, however."

Albus merely nodded, evidently having expected Skeeter's obnoxious presence. "All the more reason we should be glad Mr. Dazai is no longer at Hogwarts, for the moment. No magical newspaper would dare to enter the muggle world so brazenly. He'll be far safer there than in Hogwarts."

Severus nodded stiffly. He gripped the letter in his hands more tightly.

Would Dazai be safer at home?

"Albus—"

"Severus," Dumbledore interrupted. He spun around, a flash of his magnificent, starry cloak startling Snape back a step. His eyes were steely and sharp. "Neither Voldemort nor Hogwarts has the Philosopher's Stone."

"Some third party must be involved. I have heard nothing from any of my contacts about the stone's current owner, though they must have someone planted inside the campus."

"Perhaps."

"*Perhaps*," Severus felt his eyes narrow. "What does that mean?"

His hands clenched around the letter. The curly, black ink pressed into his palm. It didn't seep into his skin like snake venom, but Severus thought it must have been close.

"There is quite a lot about the theft that we are still unclear on. I merely wish to consider all of the possibilities and prepare for all alternatives."

Severus recalled his interrogation of Dazai with a frown. Nothing about their conversation had really answered Severus' questions. To say that Albus had been displeased would be an understatement. "Mr. Dazai—"

"Enough about the boy, Severus," Albus snapped. "We need to focus our attentions on more important things. If Voldemort is not responsible for the theft, we need to work fast to get ahead of whoever did."

Severus' mouth dropped open. However, once his stupefaction had passed, rage split his expression into a harsh scowl. But before Snape could fully let loose his livid thoughts one Dumbledore, the man sighed.

The weary expression on Dumbledore's face was most unusual. The headmaster carried with him an air of absolute certainty. He was an expert in his field, and his demeanor showed it. To see him now…

Well, *now* it was just making Severus angry.

"Though I suppose you are right. For Quirrell to take interest in him, Mr. Dazai may be of some value to us."

"He is more than just one of your pawns."

Albus didn't acknowledge the point with any more than a tilt of his head. "Would it reassure you to investigate the boy yourself?"

"That isn't what I meant."

"I'm permitting you to keep an eye on him. Is that not what you are always asking me about?" Albus' voice held little inflection when he spoke, as if the topic of a hurt child was nothing more than an annoying pest buzzing around his head. "Report back to me if you find anything of value."

The letter in Severus' hand crinkled beneath his suddenly fisted hand. A stranger's inked words bled something damning into his palm. His teeth gnashed together.

"Now, onto the bigger picture."

The phoenix turned a fiery head to the window.

"Severus," Albus said, eyes dark, "Have you ever heard of Special Ability Users?"

Chapter End Notes

Year One is complete!

This fic is long. Why.

Thanks so so much for reading! This was a really self-indulgent fic so I'm glad some other people seemed to enjoy it too lol
Year 2 is currently a WIP, but I'm kind of burnt out right now? So I don't know if/when I'll start working on it.

Love yall!

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Dazai Osamu, first year. (Abandoned) by Anonymous

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